

Christian Life Week Lectures

By

John Howard Yoder

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The Student Christian Fellowship is pleased to present in printed form the stimulating lectures delivered by John Howard Yoder at Bethel College in January, 1964.

Dr. Yoder is an instructor at the Goshen and Mennonite Biblical Seminaries. His teaching field is primarily in the area of theology, but he has written and studied and spoken widely in the fields of social concern. He has also participated numerous times in ecumenical conversations in Europe and America and has made a significant contribution to the theological thought of our day.

These lectures are copied from tapes made during the (extemporal) presentation, corrected only slightly for grammar.

Bethel College

Walter Klaassen

January, 1964

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WE HAVE NO CHOICE
(II Cor. 5:13-20 NEB)

The Apostle Paul's second letter to the Christians at Corinth, from which we have read a snatch together, is an intensely personal document, a very difficult one to read and to understand at points, and sometimes an embarrassing one. The apostle is responding in this piece of correspondence to a group of his own spiritual children, to critiques and to outright attacks on his integrity and his qualifications for his ministry. In this particular passage we see some of these criticisms coming to the surface. He was accused by some of trying to "please men" (v. 11). That might in our day be a compliment, but he took it, and properly so, as an attack on his Christian integrity. He was accused of commending himself, of giving too much time to making a case for himself (v. 12). And finally, this passage to which we want to give our attention briefly reveals a still more blunt attack (v. 13). "This man is out of his mind."

The attack is understandable. The Apostle Paul was given to mystical experiences, to ecstatic seizures, to speaking in tongues. He was so fanatical about his apostolic assignment that he had no stable family life, no stable obligations, no regular occupation, no normal, fixed place of residence. He could think and talk only about one thing. Persons like that we call in our day eccentric and this Paul was. Interestingly in response to this attack, differently from the others, he does not claim that it is ill-founded but rather says, if we were to translate it into contemporary terms, "So what if I am beside myself? If I am crazy, it is because of God." And if God is truly who we claim he is, and if he becomes the center of our lives, then are we not properly eccentric? Do we not properly have a center outside of ourselves? Is it so wrong for a man like Paul to have a one-track mind?

But then he turns the thought around. After having said, "If I am beside myself it is for God," he does at least weigh the other possibility. "If I am in my right mind it is for you." Or, "If I am logical," would be just as good a translation. This is a small phrase, a passing phrase, and yet it is the key to what we want to look at more carefully this morning. Paul is saying, "If I am logical it is for your good." He's claiming that there is something reasonable, something appropriate about his being an apostle. It isn't a haphazard accident that he is an apostle; it isn't a peculiar idea that came to him and might just as well not have come to him that made of him what he is. It is logical. The whole thing makes sense.

So our task is to attempt to think after Paul his thoughts at this one point, to see wherein consists the logic of being an apostle. What he says, even though he uses the plural "we," is spoken primarily for and concerning himself, but the reasoning behind it is of such a nature that it does apply to all of us and we must chime in with this "we."

If we seek the logic of the apostle's thought we shall find it very clearly in two steps in the verses which follow immediately.

"For the love of Christ constraineth us," we read in the King James translation. This word "constrain" is one of those beautiful, poetic Old English words, part of the charm of which is that since it is old and we don't use it any more we don't have to know too clearly what it means. So we can use it in our hymns, we can hear it, it sounds appropriate, it sounds biblical and it doesn't say too much. What does "constrain" mean? Does it mean that the love of Christ is one of several pressures bearing upon the life of a Christian? There is the love of money, the love of family, the love of reputation, the love of Christ, and just as physics would deal with the various vectors which bear upon a particle moving it this way and that, so the Christian comes out as the resultant of adding up a number of forces, the love of Christ being one of them. Is "constraint" an urge? Is it an invitation? Is it an open door which we may choose or not to enter?

The Greek word which is reflected in this translation, like the meaning of the word "constrain" when it was used by the original translators, is immeasurably more powerful and more obligatory. To be constrained is to be forced. There is no choice. And so the New English translation, though not literal, is quite accurate in rendering the sense of this passage when it reads, "The love of Christ leaves us no choice. When once we have reached the conclusion that one man died for all and therefore all mankind has died. His purpose in dying for all was that men while still in life should cease to live for themselves and should live for him who for their sake died and was raised to life." We see in these two brief verses the statement of a fundamental transformation in the Christian's view of himself; and this is not an optional matter, it's an obligation. There is no choice.

The fundamental thought here is that of an exchange. Christ died and was raised to life and somehow in doing so he did it "for us." Not "for us" in the sense that we go on untouched but benefitting indirectly from the merits of his performance. Not "for us" in the sense alone that we have some sort of credit on heavenly account books, but "for us" in the sense that now what our life means depends upon what he did for we too are now to have died. Our self concern is now dead. Our preoccupation with prestige, with pleasure, has died and we now live for him or-- to quote another statement of the apostle--"We no longer live, he lives in us and the life that we now live is the life of the Son of God."

It is the task of theology to figure out how this can be-- whether the idea was Paul's own or whether he got it from one of the other apostles or from Jesus or somewhere else and how we can make it logical, how we can put it in other words. Our task this morning is simply to reiterate that this is the assumption of the Christian. The Christian is someone for whom Christ's death and life mean a new kind of life and precisely the life of Jesus in our mortal bodies. And this for Paul was so utterly clear and so utterly taken for granted that this one statement was all it took for him to explain his ministry. And this raises for us

an uncomfortable question. Don't we assume that as Christians we still have a choice? Isn't it our assumption when we face any problem of Christian faithfulness, whether it be a vocational decision or a moral decision or an economic decision, that there still do lie before us options and we may decide for a more Christian or a less Christian way and it will be all right? Don't we tend to assume that full Christian faithfulness is the calling of a very special few and most of us are not of that category and yet we are Christians?

I understand that this congregation is preparing for a series of studies on the themes of the church's mission and the church's peace witness. These two themes would be excellent examples on which to sharpen our grasp of the logic which the apostle is here using. Have we not assumed especially that involvement in the mission of the church, being an apostle in the modern sense, being a vehicle of the reconciling love of God, or a "minister of reconciliation" as Paul says a few verses later, is a peculiar calling of specially holy or specially trained, specially called, specially gifted people and for the rest of us it's not a call, not an option, or at least not an obligation? But the apostle says we have no choice. And the same is true in many circles of the position of Christian nonresistance to evil and concern for social and world peace. This is thought by many to be the hobby, the special gift, the prophetic vocation of the tiny minority of hearty souls. The apostle says we have no choice. If we think of ourselves as disciples for Jesus Christ then our life must be His life in the flesh.

He goes on, "Worldly standards have ceased to count in our estimate of any man." Even if once they counted in our understanding of Christ, they do so now no longer. When anyone is united to Christ there is a new world order. The old order is gone and a new order has already begun." The older translations read at this point, "We know no man after the flesh. We once knew Christ after the flesh but know him thus no longer." This has been taken by many to be a discussion by the Apostle Paul of whether he ever knew the earthly Jesus. This is a significant question; for the other apostles were all men who had known Jesus during his earthly ministry and who after the resurrection could point back to this experience, could repeat firsthand the words of Jesus and could testify firsthand that the man they saw resurrected was also the man with whom they had lived for years. This Paul could not do and some critics said for that reason this man Paul is not an apostle. Therefore this passage has been understood by many to be Paul's defense saying, "I don't need to know Jesus according to the flesh."

This can't be his point because he also says, "I know no man after the flesh," and certainly all the other people he had to deal with were still living and walking around. His point is a quite different one. For precisely the word "flesh" did not mean the human body but it meant the way in which we are connected to this world and its obligations and its bondage, its commitments, its hold upon us, our drives and the pressures with which this world pushes us about. And therefore the New English translation is once again not literally correct but proper in saying, "Worldly standards have ceased to count in our estimate of any man."

Before his conversion Paul, or Saul, had thought of Jesus according to worldly standards. He had thought of him as a Galilean rabble rouser. He had thought of him as an unorthodox pretending Rabbi, and he had properly with this understanding devoted himself to wiping out the memory of this man. This had changed with his coming to faith. Anyone else would have thought of these believers at Corinth and of the city around them as a host of not very worthwhile people. It was a disorderly city and in fact a disorderly church with all sorts of things going on which had to stop. Paul could have spoken of these Corinthians in human terms as unreliable, as unfaithful to him and to their Lord, but he opens his letter by addressing them as brethren and as saints. These are demonstrations of the way in which Paul no longer thinks of people as what they are but as what they are in Christ. He no longer thinks of people as liberal or conservative, as Jew or Greek, as poor or wealthy, as of German background or otherwise. He thinks of people as they are, as they might be, as what they are called to be, as what is promised to them, in Jesus Christ. This again is what made him an apostle. Just as he was transformed by thinking of himself in the light of Christ, his view of the world was transformed by his thinking of every other human being in the light of Christ.

Hasn't our failure as a denomination, as the Christian church of the western world, our failure to be truly missionary, to be truly winsome in the faith we proclaim, been closely tied to our failure to believe that we can think of every human being no longer according to what he is in himself, according to worldly standards, according to his race and class and training but as what he is in Christ? Is it not our recognition of the boundaries of class and color, as if they still mattered, which keeps us from being ministers of reconciliation?

A French evangelist of my acquaintance was once a prison chaplain. Through his ministry there came into being in a prison a little cell of Christian believers whose lives had been truly transformed by their response to the Gospel and who became in that prison house a Christian church. They believed what he preached to them. They believed that they were forgiven, that in spite of what the Republic of France held against them their slate was clean with God and with their fellow Christians. The leader of this congregation was then released. He went out into the free society to get a job. And he went to church. Obviously he went to a Protestant church and he was received into the congregation. And he got acquainted with a young lady in the congregation, concerning whom the theology told him was his spiritual sister, and with whom with the passage of time he developed the conviction that they should be married. And then he discovered that for this girl's father he was still a criminal and would be a criminal forever. There was no forgiveness. He could not get around being judged by worldly standards. What the evangelist had told him in prison wasn't true.

One of our missionary workers in North Africa was introduced to that country by an elderly missionary lady who was deeply impressed by the ingratitude of the Arab. "You give them something and they just want more. You don't give them something, they'll complain. They're not only ungrateful, they're unreliable. You have to keep everything locked." And this lady's experience had proven her point. But this young Mennonite missionary girl somehow couldn't adjust to this set of assumptions about people. She was once left alone in the house with the Arab caretaker family. Instead of continuing to be afraid of them and of their ungratefulness and their propensity to theft, she couldn't keep herself from dealing with them as if they were people, respecting them, thanking them, asking their opinion. It was only a matter of a few days until they were asking her if she had enough. By dealing with people as if they were trustworthy, as if they were capable of gratitude, she discovered that they were. By dealing with them under the other assumptions, her elderly colleague had proven that those other assumptions would also hold.

And so it is with the poor in our nation, with the Indians and the colored. We deal with them, even if we insist on their rights, largely behind the screen of their being different from us. And if we want to make the case for Civil Rights, don't many of us argue, "I've known some fine Negroes," by which we mean Negroes who were pretty much like us whites? We don't ask of our children or of our cousins that they be "fine" before we acknowledge our ties to them. If it is true as the apostle says, that when anyone is united to Christ there is a new world, the old order has gone and a new order has already begun, then the fundamental revolution in our thinking about human beings must be this intentional, conscious overcoming of traditional patterns of classification. Obviously the same must obtain in international relations with reference to what we think about Cuba and about the Kremlin. There is no making sense of contemporary United States foreign policy which can be clearer unless one adopts the assumption that this is a nation whose causes are fundamentally good and holy. And any adversary, or even anyone attempting to be uncommitted, is thereby an adversary not only of the United States but of the Good and of the Truth and cannot be fully human, cannot be fully entitled to recognition on the face of the earth. Now we can't deal with national politics under the assumption that every man is in Christ. But we Christians gathering about the testimony to the revolution which has come in world history through this man Jesus Christ, cannot do otherwise but to exercise precisely this criticism which makes of every man a potential brother and which even goes the second mile in making first of the distant person, first of the enemy as Jesus did, the person we want to deal with as a brother. For only there in that crucial test case does it become clear, does it become definite that for us everything has changed and that we have drawn the conclusions which follow from Jesus' leaving us no choice.

Let us pray.

Our God and Father, God and Father of our Lord Jesus, who came to us when we were his enemies, who died and who lives that we might die to self and live to him: grant that there might take place not only

in our emotions and in our sentiment, but in our minds, in our thought patterns, in our logic, a conversion resulting from making that man Jesus the center of our life. Teach us to view ourselves as persons in whom he lives, to make our choices accordingly, to recognize that we have really no choices if we are to be in him, and teach us to see every other man as a brother for his sake. May our way of looking at people, may our habits of seeing people be truly recreated by the capacity to see him in them. Protect us against every discrimination, every preference, every lack of respect which would deny the work of they Son, in whose name we pray. Amen.

FAITH IS FOREIGN
(Hebrews 11:8-12, 17-19)

The story of salvation begins when a man leaves home. We have in the center of the list of the heroes of faith in this 11th chapter of the letter to the Hebrews two decisions from the life of Abraham which make of him the father of the faithful. To this man was given the promise of an infinitely numerous posterity. He was to be given this posterity only through the channel of his obedience to a command which made no sense; leaving the center of the world, the cultural center of Mesopotamian civilization, to leave it not knowing where he was going, not knowing in any detail why, but only because it was commanded. The one thing he did know was that he was to be given a posterity; this again a completely inappropriate promise since he had no children. And then when by a miracle he had been given a son the command came once again to give him up. And what was at stake here was not simply a life--we misunderstand the story of the sacrifice of Isaac if we think it has anything to do with whether it is right or wrong to take human life. What mattered was that it was in this boy that the cause of God was at stake. It was only through this son Isaac that there could be a posterity; yet Abraham was ready to obey.

And Abraham is for all times the pattern of faith. Faith means we accept being cut off from the normal ways in which a society is put together, in which a family takes care of its future, in which a social unit defends itself. And the total history of Israel, not only in the Old Testament times but even up to our day, is the story of a tension between the idea of mission, of being sent to bring to the world the knowledge of the true God, and on the other hand the idea of nationality, settling down within the borders of a biological people.

The call to Abraham was to be the father of a new kind of community, a community which would be defined not by blood (an ethnic community), nor by soil (a geographic unity), as all other human communities are defined, but by faith. And what is faith? Faith is first of all obedience. When we read the beginning of this 11th chapter to the

Hebrews, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the assurance of things not seen," we are sometimes permitted to persist in the wrong idea that to believe means to believe the unseen, the invisible and that faith is the process of swallowing hard and accepting what one really should not accept for any good reason but simply take it on faith. In Alice in Wonderland there is the story of the Red Queen who tried to believe three impossible things every morning before breakfast, as if faith were simply a sort of mental gymnastics, pushing one's self beyond the normal limits of logic by believing the invisible, the unseen, that which one has no reason to believe. But if we let these first verses of the chapter be interpreted by the rest of the chapter they have a much more precise meaning.

Faith is believing promises which have not yet been fulfilled and therefore obeying commands which do not seem immediately to be meaningful. Think of Noah building on dry land a three-story, tar-covered, wooden barn. We have illustrated this thing so often for our children as a sort of boat that we actually don't see the fact that Noah had no idea it was going to be a boat. In fact, the way the story reads he was surprised that the thing floated. He was simply doing what God said. He spent most of a hundred years doing it, and it made no sense. But he obeyed because God had commanded. He didn't know why but yet it worked and it was ultimately meaningful. And the whole series of heroes of faith in this passage (Hebrews 11), is a series of people who obeyed when it was not visible that obedience would make sense, would pay, would work.

The center of this faithful obedience in almost every one of these cases was the acceptance of foreignness, the breaking of ties, the exodus, the fleeing of Jacob, the sacrifice of Isaac. So there is about faith always this element of willingness to sacrifice the normal ties of human community, the community of the family and of soil. This is the hope that stays alive, this is the vision that stays alive in the entire Old Testament even when Judaism was falling more and more clearly into the limits of a narrower national vision of her calling. To the end the prophets were promising that a day would come when Jerusalem would be the center of the world, not the imperial center from which orders would go out to all the nations, but the moral center to which all the nations would come to be taught the law of the Lord. The Old Testament story falls short of this promise, but it's the background for New Testament fulfillment.

This morning we gave our attention to the way in which the experience of Jesus Christ changes our view of our neighbor, who he is and how we see him. We noticed the effects of this changed perspective upon our understanding of our mission to the world and upon our understanding of Christian reconciliation. It's worth looking at the other side of the same coin. If we no longer think of men after a human manner according to the flesh, according to worldly standards, (these are the various phrases that are used to translate this passage we looked at this morning), this will also change our estimate of human groupings, of human loyalty to defined communities. Often, especially in the recent

tradition of certain Mennonite groups, we have understood "non-conformity" to have to do primarily with abstaining from certain disreputable or not very respectable types of groupings and behaviors.

The real issue in understanding the kind of spiritual distinctness that we are called to as followers of the faith of Abraham is not this kind of being different from those whom the larger society is not especially interested in either but it's whether we can shake ourselves loose from an unlimited commitment to the business community, to the community of social class, to the community of people of like ancestry, from the community of the nation. And it's worth noticing what all of these loyalties have in common: the loyalties of business, class, race, clan, and nation. These loyalties are all automatic. Very few people decide upon their nationality. They're born into it. And even many of those who migrate for one reason or another decide upon a land and the nationality is automatically the effect of their moving there. They give to a person his identity. They answer the question, "What am I" "I'm an American; I'm white; I'm Pennsylvania Dutch; I'm from the middle class." It is these automatic community relationships which give me my identity at the outset. They also give me my security. They constitute a promise of my parents and my society to me that if I stay what I am I will be somehow taken care of. I will somehow be able to fit in, be acceptable and accepted among people of my kind. They even give a guarantee of righteousness because it is assumed that our cause is just, be it the cause of a nation or a denomination or even of a given immigrant group, of a given professional class, a given labor union, a professional society. It is assumed that the purposes for which we have gathered together to maintain our identity as a group are good. You don't see the members of a labor union evaluating their claims for different working conditions, different salary levels by asking, "Is this right?" It's assumed that the demands that they make as far as they can be obtained are good because they are the center around which this community is formed. We don't find racial groups, we don't find the National Association of Manufacturers, asking whether the demands that they make when they come together as a group to seek the interest of themselves as a group are just. They assume that. It is all the more self-evident according to our common experience for the nation, "my country right or wrong." As a result, all of these communities label evil. Evil is what is different; evil is what is black; evil is what is foreign; evil is what is not the way we do it. And evil is not only labeled so that we can identify it, it's far away. And by keeping it away, by keeping Communism away, by keeping the Negro in his place, by keeping the working man in his place, we are righteous and we are safe.

These groupings not only usually give a sense of identity, of security, and of righteousness, but in fact they usually are given a religious sanction. So it was that the first labor unions, the first insurance societies were actually at the same time lodges or almost churches. So it is that a minority racial group tends to maintain a greater degree of religious solidarity than the Americans in the melting pot--as Mennonites can testify. So we give a religious sanction to these

automatic human communities in which we find ourselves. But what does it mean to look at these communities from the viewpoint of Abraham or of Jesus in our day?

In our day we have to say what did not need to be said in all of the past centuries. There are in every nation of the world, although with great variation in degrees of density of population, Christians. There are in almost every social category Christian believers, although again not with equal density. And the first moral solidarity, the first obligation, the first home, the first community responsibility of the Christian is to this worldwide fellowship. We find it hard to think this way, but from the point of view of New Testament faith it is impossible to think any other way, but to affirm that what relates Christians in North America to Christians in Poland or China, in the Soviet Union, in Africa is more fundamental and more vital than what relates them to non-Christians on the other side of the street in Newton.

Secondly we must look at the whole world even where there are not Christians as potentially an obligation for us because our mission is to the world and specifically to the uttermost parts of the world. And beyond these two obligations, after these two obligations, first to recognize present Christian community as a worldwide reality which is our first commitment, and secondly to recognize every man on earth as potentially a brother whom it is our business to make into a brother, after these two, the responsibility to our own group, to our self group, to our ego group, runs a poor third. Not only third but so often in competition to these higher loyalties that the normal way in which Jesus spoke of loyalty even to family (to say nothing of nation) was in predominantly negative terms. We all know what he said about not being able to follow him unless we would be willing to hate father and mother, sister and brother, houses and lands. Remember the time when to him there came the message that his family was out there on the edge of the crowd and wanted to talk to him, he said, "Who's my family? Anyone who hears and does the will of my father is my family." This was a brutal thing to say, and much more in Israelite society with its extremely close bonds of blood relationship than it would be today. And when Jesus was asked by a man who maybe really wanted to know and maybe was just dodging, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus didn't name a neighbor but the Samaritan, the most unacceptable, the most disrespected person that could be found in the near environs of Jerusalem. Today Jesus would have told the parable about the "good Cuban."

I think it's obvious what this means for our consideration of a Christian peace witness. Often, perhaps almost always, in our history we have thought of the Christian attitude toward war and military service as predominantly the respecting of certain rules about taking life. The Old Testament says, "Thou shalt not kill." Jesus says, "Love the enemy." Therefore to keep the rules, to be good, we shall not take life and we shall seek to do good to the enemy. This is not wrong, but the real issue is far deeper. We do after all still take life. We run that risk every time we get in an automobile. We run it with the use of other modern machinery. The real issue is: "to what cause is it possible

knowingly, intentionally, to sacrifice someone's life?" And what's really wrong with killing in war is not only that there's a rule against killing somewhere in the Bible, but that killing in war assumes that my nation is a worthy object of devotion, to which I may properly sacrifice the life of another man in another nation whose only offense has been to serve his nation with the same kind of loyalty I give my own. It's because the nation is an idol that killing in war is wrong. It's a sin not against the sixth commandment but against the second. A nation is an idol because it is made by man. A nation is an idol because it is not clearly righteous. A nation is furthermore an idol because it isn't true, it isn't there. It's a myth. We have for instance been taught in this country that we live under institutions which can be called government of the people, by the people, for the people. We grow up sincerely believing that in some sense we are the government. Our purpose this evening is not to study sociology or political science--I'd be willing to discuss that some other time. As a matter of fact, it simply isn't true. We are not the government. Democracy is still the best possible way in which subject peoples may contribute to the way in which they are governed, but they are not the government. Similarly we are given the impression from somewhere that this nation, especially the United States of America and perhaps to some almost similar extent, Canada and Britain, is a fundamentally Christian nation because it was founded by believing men who wanted to have the church at the center of its experience even though separated organizationally from the government administration. This is again historically simply not true that the myth of the government being only the people and the myth of our nation being a holy nation, a Christian nation, "in God we trust" as we say it on our money and our postage stamps. This is a further demonstration of the effort to cover with a religious theme the claims of the national community upon its members. If our non-resistance therefore is to be more than the request of a particular cultural minority for social privilege, we must find ways to make clear that it is the testimony to a wider loyalty, not that we are unwilling to serve society but that the society we want to serve is not a national one but the society of all men for whom Christ died.

This sense of the Christian's calling to be foreign similarly has something to say to our understanding of our Christian mission. We look back on almost two centuries of the most magnificent missionary effort of our history as the Christian West, the great missionary movement going out from Europe and then from North America to almost all the rest of the world through which the church has been planted in almost every corner of the earth. We seldom admit--and those of us who like myself work for mission boards are not always the most careful to report--to what extent the work of the Christian mission not only in these last two centuries but over the centuries has been vitiated, undermined, even denied by nationalism.

This is not a new thing as I suggest. In the third and fourth and fifth centuries after Christ one of the places that the Christian church flourished was North Africa. It was from North Africa that the church received some of the greatest thinkers and writers and church leaders, St. Augustine, Tertullian, Cyprian, but this remained the church

of the dominant Roman imperial population and when Rome's authority waned the church faded. It didn't die out completely for several centuries but it had been a foreign element in North African population. It did not have deep roots.

Facing the threat of Islam through the Middle Ages of the Arabs and then the Turks knocking at the door of Europe once from Spain and once from Macedonia, the Christian church more and more identified itself with the nations of Europe or with the continent of Europe thought of as one great Christian political unit. It was from there that the Crusades went out representing the cause of the Cross through holy wars and to this day it is Islam which is the most difficult part of the world to reach with any kind of Christian message because they know so much about Christianity. They know it is the tribal religion of European militarism.

I have personally had something to do with our church's missionary and relief efforts in Algeria. The modern experience of Algeria with Christianity was marked in the 15th century by a siege of the largest port city of that time, the city of Oran, by a Spanish fleet. When the Spanish fleet came into the harbor and the city surrendered, 5,000 Arabs were killed to make the victory complete. On every ship sailing into that harbor was embroidered the cross; for the admiral of that fleet was a prince of the church, a Cardinal. This was Christian imperialism.

Moslems are not closed to Christianity because they don't know what it's about. They're closed to it because they know too much of the alliance of the Christian faith with European natural community militarism. One of our missionary workers was talking to an Algerian (the story is so fitting I've reported it more than once) who responded, "Yes, that's fine, but that's not for us, because obviously we're Arabs and Jesus is French." If there's anything we can be sure about, Jesus was much more like an Arab than like a Frenchman, but to these people Jesus was the national religious object of worship of the French colonists and since the French have left the place Jesus largely has too. This was ancient history but, to an extent greater than we wish we had to recognize, the modern missionary movement has also been tied to the economic and political power of the Western world. Sometimes there have been direct ties to colonial expansion. Dutch missions went to Dutch colonies, Danish missions went to Danish colonies, Belgian missions went to Belgian colonies and received special favors from colonial administrations because of their cultural contribution and because of their pacifying effect upon the peoples. But even when there were no overt ties and even when there was no intention of moral compromise on the part of the missionaries there was still a very direct cultural, linguistic, racial and economic relationship between the missionary and the colonial administrator.

Seen from here, from the sending church in Western Europe or North America, the missionary is a person who accepts great sacrifices and goes to dangerous places to run really great risks at cost to himself, his health, even his life and that's all true. It's even true today to some extent. But seen from there the missionary is, or used to be until

very recently, the only person in the community to have an automobile, one of the few people in the community to have servants. He possesses an American or Western European passport which guarantees that any time he can return to the life he temporarily gave up and he is generally strongly preoccupied to make sure that his children will grow up not where he is serving but where he was born.

And of course this identification of the Christian mission with nationalism has been made even more clear to the rest of the world by the participation of the so-called Christian nations in the world wars which they have twice begun. As a result it has too often been the case that the Christian church has been planted on foreign soil but not truly planted in that society because it has been insufficiently distinguished from the nation of the missionary. Then the great adjustments which the younger churches of the world must make to become truly "national" are not the adjustments in the recent past through which they have received independence from the mission board administratively but the adjustments of the future in which they must find cultural independence from the Western origins of their churches. The missionary wave of church planting around the world--which in all its weakness was a great and providential work of God--did coincide, to its own loss, with this wave of cultural and political expansion of the West and now that wave is being thrown back. If the church is not to be thrown back she must find new ways of identifying with the places where she lives, thereby separating herself from the traditional identity with the West.

I've used these applications in the realm of peace and mission not because they're the only ones but because they seem to be especially visible points at which the foreignness of the Christian, his willingness to give up local ties can become meaningful. I'd like to suggest one other way in which this can become more personal. When we think about the way in which Jesus once asked the young man to give up his wealth it's easy, even for American students who recognize they are relatively well off compared with the rest of the world, to feel that "this doesn't really apply to us because we after all don't dispose of our own financial resources. We are not wealthy, we have no source of income of our own." In many cases this is true. American young people seldom realize to what extent they dispose of another kind of wealth and that is the wealth of mobility. Many American young people go through their teen years and even through college without knowing what they are going to do vocationally. Ninety per cent of the young people in the world know what they're going to do for the rest of their life because they were born into it. This capacity for choice, which seems to us to be sometimes a burden, is actually a tremendous privilege and a call to the Christian young person. If he senses something of the foreignness, the footlooseness of the Gospel, the Christian young person will capitalize upon this wealth to put it at the disposal of the poor.

We sometimes think of this theme of being different, being foreign, not fitting in, as something we Mennonites have been good at. We've always been a minority. We've been conscious of it and usually proud of it. That's just what Jesus is not talking about. He's not

talking about people who are automatically in a minority for cultural and ethnic reasons. That kind of separateness is still one of these automatic communities which the Christian is freed from. And now we face the strange contradictory development that after having been different from the rest of the world for the wrong reasons, Mennonites are falling over themselves to get like the rest of the world again for the wrong reasons. Not in order to bring to the world a message, not in order to get around the world with a new sense of the universal brotherhood promised by the Gospel, but just to be like other people and to get in on what we've been missing all these years.

Let the example of Abraham, let the teaching of Jesus bring to our consciousness in a new way that the normal place of the Christian in society is outside, "outside the camp," as the letter to the Hebrews says it. Not outside in another little camp but freed from emotional commitment, freed from binding moral commitment to the nation, the class, the clan, freed not to be irresponsible but to be infinitely more widely responsible--for the promise to Abraham, although we have as much trouble believing it as he did, is true. It is true that the ultimate purpose of God is the creation of a community that is not bound according to the limits of these automatic human communities of birth.

We have in the first vision of John in the book of Revelation a view of the heavenly courtroom in which there is "one sitting on a throne" surrounded by strange angelic creatures, and by 24 elders praising him. Then there appears on the scene someone holding a scroll, symbol of the meaning of human history, symbol of destiny. What does it all mean? This scroll is written all over on both sides but nobody can read it because it is sealed and John weeps because no one can open the scroll. This means (translating out of the language of Revelation) that John weeps because no one can tell him what it is all about. What's the meaning of human history? Why does God let it all go on? Nobody can say. "There was no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth able to open the scroll or to look inside it. I was in tears because no one was found. But one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep for the lion from the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has won the right to open the scroll and break its seven seals.'" Then John sees the lamb, slain, standing before the throne and a new song that couldn't be sung before breaks out from the angelic creatures and the 24 elders and finally from ten thousands of ten thousands of people praising the lamb, "Thou art worthy to take the scroll and to break its seals for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst purchase for God men of every tribe and language and people and nation, and thou hast made of them a royal house to serve our God as priests and they shall reign on earth." The meaning of human history is the creation of the international, interracial community--men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation which is the church of Jesus Christ. It is for the sake of this fellowship that we are called to recognize that for the true fulfilment of our lives our basic attitude towards the human communities into which we are born and among which we live is that of migrants and foreigners.

TO SAVE OUR LIVES
(Matt. 10:37-39)

There is perhaps no more typical statement of what we mean in the Western world by being a human being than the classic phrase, "To thy own self be true." It is characteristic of the Western world as over against the rest of the world, and it's also characteristic of American society as over against the rest of the West, that we have a sure and solid vision of a person's duty to be himself. We have confidence in the nobility of the self, in the autonomy of the self:-- It should be its own boss--and in its capacities to do so. Nowhere else in the world and in no other age would it have been a compliment as it is in our society to say of a person that he is a self-made man. Our civilization has grown up around the image of the pioneer, frontiersman, and the businessman who is able to get what he wants. This image from our cultural heritage has been furthered by certain recent streams of educational theory, family structures, and organization methods, in which the concern has been, as a corrective against other patterns of education, to let the young person grow up naturally to be himself. And yet it is this same American society, dedicated as no other society has been to the cultivation of the self, in which we see the most alarming indices of moral illness, of rising divorce rates, rising rates of mental illness incidents, rising rates of crime, juvenile and otherwise. And why is it? Of what are we sick? Of ourselves.

So Jesus was not speaking a word of condemnation, Jesus was not crushing man, but he was giving us a promise and an opening when he said that he who seeks to save his life or his self or his soul will lose it and that it is in losing one's self, one's soul, one's life, that one can truly find it. Jesus is not saying that life is bad, the self is bad, but he's talking about how to save it. In so doing he gives us for saving our lives a pattern fundamentally in contradiction to that of the modern American image of what it means to truly being a human being.

Man is made to be eccentric in the literal sense, to have his center outside of himself, to be part of a larger whole of which he himself is not the axis around which all turns. Then the search to be ourselves, the command which is so often spoken to us, sometimes by our parents or our teachers and always by our society, "be yourself," is precisely the source of our lack of balance. Jesus said to people who were concerned primarily for food and clothing, because those are the fundamental needs (and it is surprising how little people who have no food and clothing are bothered about their self image) that if they seek first the kingdom of God then all these other things, food and clothing and housing, will be thrown in. Something like the paper you get at a butcher shop. If you ask the butcher for paper, he'll say, "No, I don't sell that." But you say, "How am I going to take home the liver I buy?" "Well, I'll wrap it for you." And you get all the paper you need to carry your liver home. So it is with happiness. So it is with self. It will be given to us. We shall discover it in passing if it is not our central concern, and the more we look for it directly the less it will be there.

Ever since what Jesus said on this subject was first pronounced efforts have been made, and especially ever since the Renaissance, to smuggle back into Christian thought sense of proper self concern. One of the places that this is trying to get its nose back under the tent has been the analysis some have made of the command of Jesus to love our neighbors as ourselves. People have argued, with a Pharasaical logic quite foreign to the spirit of Jesus, "that must mean that you must first love yourself." Jesus' point was simply the opposite. It was, "You know very well what it means to love yourself, now you are to attach to others this kind of concern: I don't have to tell you what it means to love others because you know what it means to love someone, you've been loving yourself. Now just do that for others."

The same kind of effort to smuggle self concern back into the Gospel has come from those who think of the Christian faith as a calculated risk. Christians, they argue, are people who believe they can sacrifice, they can even suffer, they can discipline themselves in this life because somewhere else there will be some sort of evening up and they'll be rewarded for what they missed here. This again is not the way Jesus spoke of it. And perhaps still more sensitive, and even more insidious, is the effort to get self concern back in through modes of evangelism, through preachers who tell us (if they are theological conservatives) that we must save our souls because it would be a shame if my own soul was lost, or (if they are not theological conservatives) who tell us about the power of positive thinking and how if we just look up, take a deep breath, and tell ourselves everything is going all right, it will be true, and we'll really sell more vacuum cleaners if we pray.

Jesus challenged not only the calculating self-concern of the crude and the brutal but even the pious self concern of the godly. This is why we have difficulty understanding the attitudes of the two men, who probably must be recognized as the two greatest human figures of the Bible apart from Jesus himself, Moses in the Old Testament and the Apostle Paul in the New, each of whom is recorded as having said that his own personal "religious" salvation mattered less to him than the fulfillment of God's purposes for God's people. The evangelists haven't told us that; they've told us we must first of all let ourselves be saved. This man Paul not only said he would be willing to be personally condemned if only God's purpose were to go on through his people, he also had a very unhealthy attitude, according to modern standards, toward his own integrity. He thought there was nothing wrong in eating meat, but if he was associating with people who would be scandalized by the fact that this meat came from a pig in sacrificial slaughtering ceremony, he said, "I'm ready to be a vegetarian for life." He had no psychological home; when he was with the Jew he acted like a Jew, when he was with the pagans he threw away his Jewish scruples. He had no spiritual home, no place to feel he could be himself. He was always adapting to the people he was trying to win. He had no psychic integrity and there were people who told him so.

But then is it better to hate yourself, if we are not to love ourselves? Hasn't psychiatry warned us that self-hate or even self-disparagement is itself a sign of illness? Isn't "accepting ourselves" a necessary part of maturity? Is maturity, in a sense, what Jesus is against? We have to say yes and no. But this question coming to us from the modern concerns and insights of mental health does give us an occasion to clarify more precisely what Jesus did and did not mean. He did not mean that we should or could be unconscious of ourselves, unaware of our problems and our feelings, our tensions and our needs. In fact there is nowhere in the literature of ancient man the kind of revelation of what's going on on the psychic insides of a personality that we have in the Old Testament in the experience of a Jeremiah or in the New Testament in the letters of the apostle Paul. They were enormously sensitive and self-aware persons but they did not let their self awareness become the fundamental problem of their lives. They did not let their self esteem be the fundamental standard in their service to God or their finding a place among men.

The second thing that we are perhaps able to see a little more clearly, thanks to the insights of the mental healing arts, is that systematic self-abnegation, self-denial for its own sake, is not what Jesus was talking about and is no better than outright and brutal self seeking; for self-abnegation is doubly self centered. It is selfish first of all because we must look clearly at what it is that we are denying and be very conscious of the sacrifice we are undergoing and then secondly, because there is the other self, the higher self, the better self, which is very proud of itself because of what it is denying. We cannot lift ourselves out of ourselves. The only way to lose self is to be drawn up into something bigger. Man cannot do anything with his problem of self concern because every effort to do something about it makes it worse. The one thing that can happen to us is to be drawn up into what Jesus called the kingdom, which is the flow of fellowship relationships stretching from Jesus' own coming into the world toward the accomplishment of his purposes for the world, in which men and women are drawn along in the stream which carried them. They no longer have to stop to ask, "Am I happy? Am I being myself? Am I going somewhere?"

One of the mottoes being spread over our billboards in recent months by an organization called Religion in American Life is "You can lift your life--go to church." Well, if that's why you go to church, don't. Because you can't. The one thing that can happen is that you can be lifted out of your life by a different kind and quality of involvement in human history which we call faith.

Whether Protestant, Catholic or Jewish, this motto, "You can lift your life" is the motto of main stream American religion. If this religion calls itself liberal then the reason you can lift your life is that man, including yourself, is basically good and our world, if we just try a little harder, will be made better and better. If you're in that portion of the American religious main stream which calls itself conservative, then the way you can lift your life is by accepting

proper doctrinal statements and believing things that are hard to swallow and then it will be all right.

Your parents tell you that you should lead a decent life and then you will be happy. And then we do and we aren't. There are, I suggest, few worse sources of demoralization in the personal experience of many of us, in logic, and in the history of the church, than the hosts of preachers and editorialists and moral teachers who feed on our self love by telling us that if we only do the will of God we'll be happy. They thereby keep us immature and feed on that immaturity. If we do the will of God in order to be happy we aren't doing the will of God. If we do the will of God because he is God then (lo and behold!) we'll look back and discover we've been happy. This is what the technicians call a paradox.

So we can't look at our self and throw it away. We can't look at our self and fulfill it. We can't look at our self and do anything with it because the very process of turning around to look at it ties us in knots. And what we need is not something other than the self which we should realize. Realize means to make real, but we can't make anything real. What can happen is that we can be borne up by or sucked into the reality that is already there, the reality of God's forgiving, helping, serving, suffering work in human history through ordinary people like us who have become so involved in God's serving the world, in God's suffering for the world, in God's forgiving men through men that they don't stop to think until it's over that this has been joy.

Shall we pray.

We come before thee our Father in the name of thy Son, of him who according to the testimony of the apostles did not consider his status, his place, his dignity, a thing selfishly to be grasped, but who emptied himself; and who not for the love of suffering but for the love of men became man; who not in hatred of self but in love for others became a servant, a slave, and died for men at the hands of men, the death of a despised criminal. Teach us what it means, that this has been thy path through this world to fulfillment. Teach us what it means that it was this beaten and destroyed man whom we praise as Lord because he has been raised from the dead, because he has been highly exalted, because it is he whom every tongue shall confess is our Lord. Teach us in our praise not to stop to think whether we choose to believe but simply to be drawn along in the fact of his victory in whose name we do today praise thee. Amen.

FAITH IS RESURRECTION
(Romans 6:3-13)

We used to think the Bible was like Kansas--pretty flat, roughly the same altitude from one end to the other with no specially notable projections. Recent study has made it much more clear that the Bible is rather like Switzerland with some extremely visible high points which serve as orientation centers for the rest of the landscape. Or, if you permit me to change a metaphor in midstream, like Egypt which wouldn't be there at all if it weren't for the Nile. It has one center from which the entire meaning of that country is derived. Without the Nile there would be no Egypt. There could be a New Testament, there could be a Christian church without the Apostle Paul or without the virgin birth or without the Sermon on the Mount, although it would be much the poorer. But there could be no Christian church and there would be no New Testament without the resurrection.

This is true first of all in a simple literary sense. The NT came to be written because there were people explaining to one another first orally then in writing what the resurrection meant. In the study of the biblical documents a careful analysis of how they came into being, how the tradition was transmitted first by word of mouth and finally put into writing has demonstrated with increasing clarity that this is the case. This is true as well of the way the apostles preached. The first apostolic sermons were simply testimonies to the reality of the resurrection. It is also true logically that there would be no church without the resurrection. There would be no need for a church. There would be no special ground for her existence and there would be no resources for her function. The moral teachings of Jesus without the resurrection could rapidly and very easily have flowed into the larger sea of great and wise rabbinic tradition and the high view which Jesus held of himself could have been forgiven him with this passage of the centuries. For those who came to believe, it was the resurrection that they believed and for those who scoffed, it was the resurrection they could not believe.

Now it means one thing to accept the resurrection in a Kansas-type Bible. If the Bible is a flat book with every page of roughly the same importance, then the resurrection is one of a thousand things to believe. It is then significant mostly--(and this has been the case for many Christian thinkers)--because it's one more sample or one more test case for the possibility of miracles, though really not fundamentally different from all the other miracles. Or it is a sample or a proof for the general truth that there is a life after death--or it is one more example of those statements hard to believe which we must believe because the Bible is true.

The significance of accepting the resurrection is quite another thing if we understand it to be the Nile of the Bible. If it is the center around which all the rest of the biblical message rotates, from which all the rest of the message draws its significance and authority, then it is also God's word to us tonight that the center of our history is that same event.

I want to lay before you this evening simply a sampling, an incomplete and an arbitrary sampling, of some of the things that resurrection faith implies. For truly the resurrection was the center of the NT and if in the eyes of the NT writers it was the center also of universal history, then for us as well it must be the point of orientation around which all the rest turns.

We began yesterday morning by observing in one of Paul's writings what the resurrection means for the Christian's understanding of himself. He sees himself as having somehow changed places with Christ himself so that the death of Christ and the life of Christ become his death and his new life. The passage that was just read to us from Romans 6 is the most extended statement of this same apostolic testimony. The resurrection is the basis of the Christian life. The Christian life is the resurrected life. The apostle says it again in chapter 8; "If the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells within you, then the God who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give new life to your mortal bodies through his indwelling spirit. It follows that our lower nature has no claim upon us. We are not obliged to live on that level. If by the spirit you put to death all the base pursuits of the body then you will live for all who are moved by the spirit of God are sons of God." (8:11-14)

Jesus spoke to Nicodemus of the change that must come to a man if he is to see the kingdom of heaven in terms of "new birth." It is from this word of Jesus himself that the theological term "re-generation" has come down in our tradition as the most current description of what it means to become a Christian. But if we were to take the language of the Apostle Paul as a guide, who has spoken much more often of this subject since the resurrection, we would see that it is much more frequent that becoming a Christian is spoken of in terms of death and resurrection. The Christian life is the resurrected life. It's a life in the power of the resurrection. One of the oldest documents of the Anabaptist movement, the so-called Schleithem Brotherly Understanding written in February, 1527, describes the candidate for baptism as one who has "learned to walk in the resurrection," a very striking phrase to describe the meaning of Christian discipleship.

This means, as we already saw in the verse I just read and as I said more fully elsewhere, that sin has no hold on the Christian. Now this is a description which we can call idealistic. But for Paul, this is the reality by which our own private experience is to be tested. This means to say first of all that in a fundamentally realistic way the apostle speaks of sin as truly having had a hold on every man, as truly having a hold on man, which can only be called slavery, as he finds himself to begin with. But the death of Christ means for us a kind of equivalent in death to those ties which sin has upon us and the resurrection of Christ means a new kind of power for a life of obedience. Something real has happened in the work of Christ which already speaks to us. So it is that in the letter to the Christians

at Colosse the apostle speaks of their having died with Christ, having in baptism been buried with him, and then having been "raised to life with him through your faith in the active power of God who raised him from the dead. And though you were dead because of your sins, he has made you alive with Christ. If then you are risen with Christ, seek the realm above." The resurrection of Christ is, for the Christian's understanding of his own position in faith, the guarantee not only of the possibility but of the reality of the moral life, the life of obedience, the life of joyful victory.

This leads us on to the second item in our brief and arbitrary sampling of meanings of the resurrection; that is the Christian understanding of moral choice. Assuming that we are empowered to do the good, what is it? What is right? The most current category of modern Protestant thought is the word "dilemma." It's not an ancient term; the term itself is old, but its use to describe the process of coming to decisions is a relatively recent one, at least in the degree of popularity it currently enjoys. To speak of moral choices as dilemmas means to say that with regard to any given problem, we have only two options before us, both of which are wrong. Moral maturity, moral wisdom, will consist in recognizing the fact that we must choose between the evils and then having the nerve nevertheless to commit one evil or the other as is necessary. One very obvious sample of this is the constantly recurring conundrum; what would you do if an unsavory character were threatening your family? You have the choice between taking his life with whatever means are necessary, and letting him do all the worst things we can imagine. We have the same thing on the international scale. We have the choice between using nuclear weapons, if necessary, on the population of the Soviet Union or China, and being reconciled to the victory of Communism over the the world. When we speak about the Christian church in society we have the dilemma: she must choose either to be involved in society and thereby responsible for all sorts of compromises and unfaithfulness, or to be withdrawn from society in a pharasaical concern for her own doing. And so we could go on. This is the way moral problems are being described for us by the most widely read and widely respected Protestant ethical thinkers in terms of dilemma.

It is a sign of the widespread intellectual sloppiness of our age that this way of thinking has been so widely convincing. If we look at it closely there are a number of things wrong with it. In the first place from the viewpoint of simple logic. Why in the world should it be assumed that in any given situation there are only two possibilities? Couldn't we use enough imagination to think at least of a third which might lie somewhere in between? What kind of facts could we appeal to to support the claim that we must choose for instance between using nuclear weapons and seeing the world fall prey to Communism without limitation? In fact, in the experience of the nations it's almost always been the case that neither of the two things happened that people thought they were choosing between.

But there are deeper reasons that this kind of reasoning is suspect. One such is on the moral level; it is the fact that we observe, if we watch these thinkers moving on to the next step, that for them it

is not really a dilemma. It is not really a choice between two wrong possibilities which could really fall either way with equal reason. It's rather a stage in the argument which then leads these thinkers on to the conclusion that we must, and they always do, choose to prefer the more self-seeking option. Take a dilemma: I should love the criminal who threatens my family; I should love my family. That's a dilemma because I can't do both. But I will always choose, if I set the argument up this way, to love my family more; so it goes always in the thinking of those contemporary Protestants who use this category of dilemma. It isn't really for them a dilemma, it's a process of reasoning which finally leads them to the conclusion: take care of yourself first.

But there's a still deeper weakness in this argument about dilemma and that's the one that really matters to us this evening. And that is that it assumes that the universe is closed. It assumes by definition that there is no possibility of the kind of thing happening that could be identified as divine intervention. If we look back to this case of personal physical threat it is for instance excluded that it might, according to the will of God, be desirable, right and possible, and it might take place, that the sacrifice of those innocent people threatened by an evil attacker could become a 'meaningful, redemptive sacrifice, what we call in Christian history martyrdom or witness. And it's also excluded that there might be provided what the epistle to the Hebrews says will always be provided when Christians are tested, "a way out."

Some of you may have read the book (I don't know whether the incident was reproduced in the film) on the life of Gladys Aylward, the little British missionary lady in Central China who was about the only outsider left behind in that part of the country during the long years of the Chinese-Japanese war, who through her own ingenuity and discernment and willingness to serve came to be respected in the neighborhood as a person of almost supernatural capacities. In the communal prison of the city, where all the prisoners were in open cells facing on an open courtyard, one of the prisoners who unexpectedly went beserk and began rushing around the courtyard full of frightened men brandishing an axe. Well, there was only one thing to do--mow him down. They called the little missionary lady in. She walked in . . . and took away the axe. That couldn't have happened if she had assumed there were two possibilities, either kill him or he kills everybody. It did happen because she assumed that there is always another possibility, the kind of unpredictable divine intervention which we could label with the technical term "miracle" whether it's contrary to the rules of physics or not. And yet this is what Christians must always affirm because of the resurrection.

One of our Dutch Mennonite brethren, a very brilliant and poetic theologian, is fond of saying that when the devil has closed all doors God opens a window. This is the meaning of the resurrection. That when from the human point of view the situation is lost and there is no way out, it is characteristic of the nature of God that there is a way out. That is what the first Resurrection was. The resurrection in the

actual, historical experience of the circle of disciples meant that when the cause of God was utterly defeated, it was not. The universe is not closed. There is no such thing for a Christian as dilemma. Certainly there are difficult moral problems. There are decisions where it is not easy to see that one way through is much better than the other. But the Christian is never condemned--in fact for that matter no one is ever condemned, but the Christian is the one who should know it--to doing wrong because nothing else is possible. The reason that he is not condemned is the fact of resurrection as not a unique accident but as a definition, as a revelation of who God is and how he operates. There was only one resurrection of Jesus, but every time an individual comes to Christian faith as the apostle has been telling us, there is another resurrection. The God we serve is a resurrecting God; we live from that daily.

One more shaft of light that the resurrection throws on our thought is the meaning it gives to all world history. In addition to affirming that Jesus was their master, the head of the church, the early Christians, in spite of appearances, affirmed that he also had a relationship to the universe, which they called "Lordship." They said that it was because of the cross and because of the resurrection that there has been given to Jesus the name that is above all names. (Sometimes we think on reading that passage from Philippians 2, and some hymn writer once thought, that the name that is above every name is the name "Jesus." That is not the point of this passage. He was named Jesus when he was born, but he was given the name above every name in that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess Jesus Christ is Lord.) It is precisely not a handful of disciples that are going to confess that, according to this hymn of the church that Paul has woven into his letter, but it is every knee in heaven and earth and in the depths. Now we don't know what that means. We don't know what kind of angelic and demonic beings he had in mind nor what he would have drawn if one would ask him to draw a picture, but it is very clear that the claim is being made here that Jesus Christ, by virtue of his resurrection and ascension, the Son of God by virtue of what has happened among men, has given the universe a new direction.

We sometimes speak in our Christian and specifically in our Mennonite circles about the difference between Christ's being "Savior" and his being "Lord." By that we mean the difference between accepting from him forgiveness and entering in his discipleship and obedience. In that case his Lordship is thought of in our terms as something we ascribe to him, as a title we give him describing the commitment we make to him. Now the point is certainly well taken that we need to recognize in Jesus not only someone to deal with our guilt and forgive us but also someone to be obeyed. But that is not what the NT is talking about when it says that Jesus Christ is Lord. It's a statement not about his relation to the Christian but to world history. In an older language this was called providence, and it's always been confessed by Christians that God in his providence (simply the old fashioned word for taking care of things) is taking care of things even beyond the circle of the church, that he rules over the affairs of nations, even of evil men.

The only difference between what the Bible says with this word Lordship and the older idea of providence is that the Lordship of Christ is more directional. He's going somewhere. Paul writes to the Christians at Corinth that he is reigning and he shall reign "until his enemies have been made his foot stool." Once again this is the language of imagery, but he is saying that world history is being directed toward a fulfilment. It's not simply that time goes on and on and on and out of this mess we hope a few people will be fished out in order to constitute a church to go off somewhere else to another place we call heaven. It's rather that this earth is being moved through the direction of the risen Lord toward the accomplishment of God's purposes which are the reign of heaven on earth. The kingdom of heaven does not mean a place off somewhere; it means heaven ruling, God ruling among men. Now we don't know how the kingdom of heaven will relate visibly to Jerusalem or to Kansas, but the biblical affirmation is that human history has been made meaningful because of the resurrection. And this is why we can see the meaning in the Cross. Christians can find sense in the life of a suffering. Christians have in the past been able to find meaning in a life of persecution and martyrdom because it was precisely the crucified Christ who is the risen Lord. And when men cannot accept the way of the Cross, when they have to take justice into their own hands, when they must use the weapons of this world in order to make things come out right in world history, it's because they do not truly believe that it is the crucified Lord who is Lord. They believe rather that it was Pilate who won that one, that it was Caesar who came out on top, so that the way to have good causes triumph is to continue to use the weapons of Caesar. Christians take the way of the Cross not because they are reconciled to weakness, not because as stoics they have adjusted to the fact that you never get anywhere in this world--Christians take the way of the Cross because Christ is Lord and therefore this is ultimately the meaningful way of effectiveness, usefulness, in history.

Our thoughts should move yet to one somewhat different kind of question. I've been talking about what the resurrection means: for moral choice, for world history, for personal history, and for the church. But there is another quite different kind of question which we can't avoid in our age and which, depending on the answer we get for it, might undermine all that we've been hearing the NT say: Did it happen? Was it real? Or, is the resurrection story perhaps simply a poetic statement of something on a quite different level.

We have to begin with the fact that the only evidence we have on the subject is the NT and that the NT is prejudiced. All that we can do as historians, and as modern men we are all equipped to go about this task, is to approach this evidence with the standards of reasonable doubt and to examine it according to the rules of evidence which means that we ask; would it be likely that this kind of claim could have been made and sustained, repeated, to appear uncontradicted in the records, if it had been patently untrue at the time? We must ask questions like why the Jewish authorities didn't make more use of evidence on the other side, if there was any, when it would have been so handy to nip in the

bud this disorderly movement in Jerusalem. Questions like how it happens that although everyone testifying in the NT testifies to the resurrection, it's recorded of almost all of them that they at first didn't want to believe it, that they were not expecting to believe it, they were not waiting for an appearance of the resurrected Lord, they were surprised when he showed up--they didn't even recognize him at first because they were for all practical purposes sure it wouldn't happen. We'd need, from the historian, an explanation of how a person like Saul, dedicating his entire life to wiping out this group of people claiming such an extravagant thing, could have himself have been struck down and turned around in a blast of light.

The prejudice that the NT witnesses have is that of witnesses. If we were attempting to gather information on an automobile accident and we found that everyone said it was the blue car that came through the stop sign, we couldn't say, "Now unless we find somebody who says it was the black car that came through the stop sign we won't believe it was the blue one because the witnesses are prejudiced." This is the nature of the witness. The truer the witness the more the testimonies will come out on one side.

We don't have record of someone who observed the resurrection and remained an unbeliever; that's just the point: if he observed the resurrection he didn't remain an unbeliever. So the test that we normally try to apply, which would make some sense in the realm of physics, or would make some sense if we were to have a chance of giving this evidence to someone who thus far was doubting, is the test we cannot apply to the biblical witness. So we have to conclude that where we do encounter a denial of the resurrection on the part of modern man, modern man is speaking not as historian reading the records and checking their credibility, but as philosopher making prior religious claims for his own assumptions about how things can have happened or could not have happened.

And these are people who say, whether on the basis of what they think is science or on some other basis, "As a general rule resurrections just don't happen." But that's no problem. We never said resurrections happen as a general rule. We only say that one happened. In fact, Christians are just as sure as anybody else is that this doesn't happen usually. That is precisely why it's so important that it did happen in the case of Jesus Christ. But then these quasi-historians really are saying more. They're saying first, "As a general rule resurrections don't happen," and secondly, "The general rule can never be broken." But this second statement is not a scientific statement. That statement is a confession of faith, a confession of faith in the absolutely unbroken regularity of the universe.

Now that confession of faith makes sense within given limits, within the limits of the laboratory where the scientist can control the material he is experimenting on. It makes sense within the limits of outer space where there are no people moving around to get in the way of the stars. It does not make sense in history because history is a

different mode of truth. History is a kind of reality which is by definition always unique. No historical event happens twice and thus no general rule can be applied sweepingly to historical events. The only way to study history is to find out what happened by finding out who saw it. We can never begin an historical investigation with any assumptions about what kind of things cannot have happened. Each kind of truth has its own mode of being apprehended and its own way of being tested. We can make general statements about the way electrons behave but only if we keep people out of the equation. If a physicist has been running an experiment with electrons and he finds that one time they behave differently from the time before he will say, "Who's been meddling with my apparatus?" The reading has become historical instead of experimental. A person got involved and where there is a person, where there is time, where there is will, the assumptions that the philosopher makes about the absolute, unbreakable regularity of mechanical processes simply cannot hold. This doesn't mean that we know all about the resurrection. It doesn't mean in fact that we know anything about how it happened, how it could have happened. What does it mean in fact to say how it could have happened? It couldn't have, but it did.

In sum: Christians are called, as no other faith calls men, to orient their lives around an event. Many claims are made for Buddha, but it would have been a contradiction in terms for anyone to say of him either that he was god (because there is no such thing as a personal god for the Buddhists) or that his human body was resurrected (because the body doesn't matter that much). Mohammed was a man, a very historical man, but precisely because of his vision of the majesty of God, he refused to make any profound claims for the meaning of his humanity for other men. It is only the Christian faith that is so preposterously relevant that it can claim that what matters for all of us and for the meaning of the history of the universe is something that happened to one person at one time at one place. Not something that happens over and over again, not something that happened as a parable, as an object lesson, as a way of pointing us to a divine truth behind the event--it is the event itself which is our salvation. The whole process of theology on the intellectual level, the whole process of Christian life on the levels of morality and personality, is simply our wrestling to discover what it means now that he has been certified Lord in Christ in that he has been raised from the dead.

Shall we pray.

We confess, our Father, that our minds have not been trained to stand in awe before happenings. We would seek for general truths, we would seek for deep wisdom. But thou hast told us to confess a happening. Make us open, make us receptive and obedient that we might plially, faithfully learn to reflect in all that we think or do our having been swept along by this unthinkable and impossible event, by thy sealing of the rightness of his suffering death with the crown of victorious life. This we ask in praise for his triumph and in his name. Amen.

TO MAKE SENSE
(Acts 17:16-34)

It would be possible to speak of the program of a school, the process of education, the business of a college, as training in coherence. In the course of your college studies you obviously accumulate data, whether it be the data of natural science; the data of history, or of literary background, but that's not really what you're here for. Your real educational growth is a matter of learning to put things together, to establish and to discern relationships between one date and another in history, between one fact and another in physical observation. This discovery which most people come to in the process of higher education that it is possible to ask, "How does it fit?", to ask the question of coherence, "Does it make sense?"--this discovery is so fundamental that it becomes for most of us a new standard of truth.

When we were children and our parents had to teach us to tell the truth, truth-telling meant that our words should correspond with what had happened, what had been observed, what we had done. But now we have a new standard of truth, an additional one. It's that ideas relate to each other in a systematic way. And so when someone proposes an idea, sets forth a thesis, we ask, "Can it be generalized? Is it always true? Will it hold under all conditions? What would happen if we would drive it to its logical extreme? Where would it lead?"

People who have gone through this process of learning to put things together and to ask about the inter-relations of different kinds of thoughts come then to look at the realm they call religion as primarily a set of answers to the questions of philosophy. Religion is a world view. It's a set of responses to the basic questions of making sense. This assumption lies behind the thinking of most people about faith whether they are inside or outside a given religious community. If we read a book describing Buddhism we want to see how Buddhism makes life make sense. When we find a man making a case for humanism he will make his case by claiming he can account for all the observations and answer all the questions.

If we then isolate from these various sets of approaches those which are called specifically religious, religion means in this context a way to make sense of all of life. And it does so, usually every religion does so, by arguing the existence of transcendence. By transcendence we mean something beyond what we normally deal with in the rest of our lives. In time, one speaks of a hereafter. In asking how many dimensions there are to our human existence, the religious person will say there's one more, whether it be height or depth. It used to be fashionable to speak of God as "up there" and now it's fashionable to speak of him as "down inside." But whether he's outside or down inside, in either case, the claim is that there is a new dimension of transcendence beyond the life we ordinarily live and that this other realm is the stuff of religion. Thus religion is the process then of making a world view out of what we think about transcendence and answering all our questions by working that in to our vision of how the world ticks and what it means to be a human being.

Then we have special problems with other world views, especially the modern ones which claim to be able to make sense out of life without any transcendence at all. They can put their experience together with no pieces left over and no questions unanswered, simply by looking at life scientifically, or humanistically.

If then we face the clash of faiths we assume, again within the framework of this search for making sense, that a faith must commend itself to us, to me. It must prove itself to me where I stand. I, from where I stand, from my present standpoint of neutrality or doubt or objectivity or noncommitment, ask questions; I ask for proof; I need to be convinced, and if I am not convinced by arguments or data or considerations which commend themselves to me, then I need not believe it. This is the position of the men in Athens. (Acts 17) They heard that this man Paul was talking about two things, two names, two proper nouns it seemed to them, Jesus and Resurrection. They apparently thought at first the resurrection was a second deity that he was talking about. They wanted to hear more about this and they assumed that it was his duty to make it make sense to them. Some of them saw right away that it didn't make sense; others were willing to give him a second try, and some of them believed. But the posture of all of them at the outset had been, "Let's hear this fellow and let's see whether what he's saying fits into where we stand so as to convince us." This is always assumed in the field that we call philosophy or religion, and it's what you assume in listening to me.

And yet if we stop to be careful, there are some pretty basic reasons to challenge this assumption that a man has a right to ask to be convinced by considerations of coherence starting from where he stands. The first reason is that, according to the testimony of most faiths and even according to the testimony of the sciences, man is a self-deceiving animal. He has within his makeup certain rather easily observable mechanisms for hiding from himself certain types of truths. The psychologist will give one name to this, the logician will give another word, and probably the man doing brain anatomy would find another way to describe it, but we're all aware of it. The human mind is not a computer; it's not an objective way of registering truths starting from real neutrality. It begins by being prejudiced in favor of its own self defense, its own self affirmation. And there are good reasons not to expect a person to admit the truth, at least not always, and not when it matters.

The second difficulty with this demand for coherence is the deeper and more logical one and that is that there are certain possible truths which by the nature of their substance cannot be measured this way. The teacher of swimming has to convince someone who is standing on the bottom of the pool that if he takes his feet off the bottom of the pool the water will support him. But as long as this person has his feet on the bottom of the pool the water won't support him. The proof can be delivered only if he abandons himself to the trust that he has, not in the water, because he doesn't trust the water yet, but in the teacher. He can observe the teacher kicking around but he might think the teacher has a special kind of life preserver or some hidden wires. He can only

really know that the water will support him after he has taken his feet from the bottom. And thus the truth that the water will support you cannot be demonstrated to someone who says, "I have to know it before I lift my feet." This is a poor parable for the fact that there are certain types of truths which by their very nature do not commend themselves to someone standing outside them. And the more a truth matters the more likely it is to be of that kind.

Well, then, what can we who begin with an effort at least to understand the real meaning of the Christian faith, and especially those of us who seek to testify to it, what can we do for those who in spite of the fact that it is not logical insist on asking for coherent, logical proof? We can attempt, to a certain extent, to translate, to transpose the ideas of Christian faith into general ideas. This is the way the apostle Paul began in the story we have just read. He told these people about his understanding of the meaning of their idolatry. He talked about geography, about how the nations are scattered across the face of the earth and yet all men are made of one blood. He talked about history, about how the nations got that way, how it happened that men are religious beings in different nations in different places. And we can still do that. We can make of Christian faith a view of history, an idealism, a personalism beside other idealisms and personalisms, and a certain amount of communication can take place. It will be challenged like other idealisms and personalisms by modern views which can get along without transcendence and think they can explain everything. But this effort at explanation will always at some point break down. There will always be something about the affirmation of Christian faith which cannot be transposed into the terms of apparent objectivity. And this happened to the Apostle Paul too. He got to a point where he had simply to report that God in all his infinity had decided to do something particular through the human career of a particular man, and a Jew at that, in a particular place, which wasn't Greece, and the thing he had done was to raise him from the dead--a very worthless thing to do in the Greek mind, because you should be glad when you're done with your body. It's a prison for the soul. And so at every point Paul was making specific statements about history that could not be generalized, could not be tested for whether they are true always and everywhere independent of circumstances and commitments. All that we can do is to recognize that this is the way it is. Some believed his report; others did not. Today the results are identical.

If God is person acting in meaningful relationships to persons, that means by definition, not by accident, that every encounter with God will be unique and not generalizable. If every action of God is unique that will have to mean that certain events by definition, by logic, and not simply by accident, will be more important than others. Certain events will be central and others will have to cluster around them to get their meaning. These central events will be events within history, events which we could call "messianic" because they give meaning to history. Now the striking thing is that it's not only Jews waiting for a Messiah, or Christians testifying that he has come, who have this messianic vision of history. Moslems of course have it as well in the

ministry of Mohammed the prophet. But Marxists have it as well. There is a messianic turning point in world history for Marxism--1917. And there is a messianic bearer of all the central meaning of history in the working class and the Communist party. And the same is really true for believers in democracy. There was a messianic day--it depends on your flavor of democracy whether it was 1776 or 1789, but at least the modern age began, and the meaningful epoch of human history and the proper organization of human society began at a specific point with the inception of Western democratic forms of government. So, it is not only Christians; it is anyone reflecting the impact that Christianity has had upon Western civilization, who is drawn to make messianic affirmations about one event in history, one period, one development in history, from which all the rest takes its meaning. And if the center of meaning in history is in history rather than general coherence, this in turn means it will be impossible to weigh a system of faith on the scales of neutral judgment, because neutrality doesn't exist. You can't be outside history and therefore neutrality is by definition false. It is attempted rebellion against the fact that history is meaningful. Anyone who says, "I'm going to wait and see if history is meaningful," is himself withdrawn from history and therefore rebelling against the meaning which it already has. So truth is inseparable from commitment to it. There is no such thing as the proof you are asking for, if you demand that it be delivered independently of an event, independently of any one unique vehicle, or independently of your response in commitment to it.

Now there are ways to ask of a faith, of a historical faith, of Christian faith, how does it make sense? Wherein is it meaningful? Wherein does it answer my questions? That will be our theme for this evening, but the way to this is not to ask, in neutrality, in non-committal objectivity, "prove it to me first." There isn't any scratch to start from.

Let us pray.

Make us aware, not only in our emotions but also in our minds, of our unending temptation to hide from the truth to protect our autonomy, to keep from being threatened, to keep from being encountered, to keep from needing to relate personally, fully, to one another or to thee. Give us the vision of our temptation as learners, students, thinkers to use our intellectual capacity to doubt and to analyze as a shield against personal encounter; to use our objectivity as a denial of the fact that we are committed; to use our pose of waiting as a failure to recognize the direction in which we are going. Open us to be spoken to through thy Son and through those who testify to him in our experience, to encounter thy working among men and to see that therein lies true liberty, true freedom, true meaningfulness, for we ask it in the name of him who once and only once in only one time and place came to men in thy name. Amen.

FAITH IS COHERENT

Our discussion this evening may appear in a sense to be somewhat of a detour; yet I feel it is a necessary detour. We were saying this morning that the Christian faith cannot be measured by the standards which unbelief would apply to it and especially not by the standard of generalizability since we can't ask of personal truth the questions that we ask of mathematical or physical formula but we ask only, "Is this personal relationship true?" And if we cannot measure personal truth by non-personal standards or historical truth by non-historical standards then the effort we are taught to make as intellectuals, as students, to check everything by whether it makes sense has certain limits.

But then it should be possible in turning the question around, it should be in fact necessary to make the claim as Christians, (just as does anyone else who is committed to a faith that is historical), to judge other positions by our own; not in a narrowminded, imperialistic or defensive way, but we must be able from the perspective of faith to speak to the counter claims.

One of the topics which was suggested to me by your Student Christian Fellowship Council was "campus philosophies of life." I'm not sure what they meant. There are some prevalent philosophies that cannot be evaluated because they don't make any general claims. The fundamental philosophy of life of an enormous number of people is simply to fit in. This is the standard which makes of most Americans loyal, patriotic Americans willing to suffer for their country and which in the very same way makes of young Russians loyal citizens of the Soviet Union, willing to suffer for their country. This is a kind of standard which precisely cannot be judged by any other claims. We wouldn't ask of a Russian young man that he be a loyal American citizen or vice versa. These are commitments which make no claim to be coherent, to be demanding. They apply only to those who choose to fit in. This doesn't mean that systematic nonconformity is a more genuine option. Nonconformity usually means that you see what other people are doing and do differently. This is just as slavish a position as is conformity because it is constantly bound to see what the crowd is doing in order not to be doing the same thing. In fact nonconformity is doubly a slavery because it's necessary not only to be different from the crowd but usually to be different in the way that a certain sub-crowd is being different all at the same time. There's really nothing more boring than the waves of campus nonconformity in the similarity that they have from campus to campus and from generation to generation.

There are still other types of philosophy that we can simply name and not be able to say much about, because they lay no claims upon us. For instance it is said (I think usually simply out of overenthusiasm) that we should enjoy art for art's sake or scholarship for the sake of scholarship or the search for learning for its own sake or pure science. Most often it isn't really meant in its radical sense, that there is no reason for doing this thing except that you want to do it, but if and when that claim is made it's one we couldn't do anything about. We can't evaluate it because it isn't really a claim. A person who says he is giving his life to art for art's sake means he has no reason he can give me why

I should give even a fraction of my life to art.

The only kind of claim that we can lay on other people is a claim that we argue has some hold on them. But then we are obliged to look at the competitors for meaningful, coherent faith in our age. If we are to make the claim that Christian faith is coherent we at least must look, even if in unfair brevity and oversimplification, at some of these competitors. Especially are we obligated to do this if we do, as many students are tempted to do or claim to do, call in to question Christian commitment because of its not being fully rational or fully satisfying because it doesn't answer all the questions. There are of course people who are agnostic in saying that we don't need to answer all the questions. We just keep plugging along and life doesn't have to be meaningful, we'll just keep on living because we're still living. But such a person can't reject Christianity because it doesn't answer the questions; he has just said he doesn't need to answer the questions. Anyone who questions the Christian faith because he claims it doesn't answer the questions is obligated himself to answer them; this is why we must put to the test the competing possible philosophies.

I think we can place them into two categories--the first the very large conglomeration of possible positions which have certain fundamental traits in common, and the second a somewhat more precise and perhaps more contemporary option for some of us. The first of these positions affirms that man is a puppet of forces outside himself in a universe which is closed. When we speak of a closed universe I mean that I was referring to yesterday evening in talking about the resurrection. The Christian claim is that the resurrection means that the universe is not closed, that we are not limited to a set of quasi-mechanical processes in which God cannot intervene and from which there shall be no exceptions.

But we face a host of faiths in our day which actually claim that the universe is thus closed and man is closed in. He is simply a creature of this mechanism. This is the position of Marxism, which we might be referring to in somewhat greater detail simply as a sample position; not that I expect many on this campus to be holding to it as a philosophy, but it's a very good example of how the thing works out logically. But it is just as true of Capitalism as a personal philosophy, for Marxism and Capitalism agree that man basically will only do what he's paid for. The only difference is whether you pay him individually or in a class. And it's also true of Militarism, which argues that the way to get people to do what you want them to do is to put pressure on them, the pressure of military threat. And it's true just as well, in a quite different way, of certain American philosophies that have called themselves Pragmatism, which have said the truth is whatever works and the process of education is the process of making man the way you want him by bringing him through the kind of experiences that are sure to make him what you want him to be.

Now you see obviously that there is here an enormous variety of distinct positions which would not like being treated as bedfellows as I am suggesting. Yet they do have in common the assumption that a human being will basically do what he is made to do. He is the puppet of or the product of the forces which act upon him and that's all. For all of

these positions, although they don't say it in the same way, religion is then what the Marxists most consistently call an ideology. It is a set of ideas whose purpose is not to reflect the facts and not to provide guidance but to serve as a sort of smoke screen or as a blind or perhaps as a justification. The Marxist says it most consistently--he says that the Christian religion was invented by the ruling classes in order that the subject peoples, being promised some future reward would accept the unjust, exploited situation in which the exploiting classes were bringing them. But there isn't as much difference as we might think between this Marxist view of religion as a smoke screen and the actual use which is made of religious ceremonies by the American armed forces, which consider them as a way of maintaining the morale of the fighters, or in the Dewey philosophy of education according to which, if religion has any place, it's just a part of the way in which we transmit moral values.

Each of these positions can make some good claims. Each of them helps to explain how the world got this way. Certainly we can read world history in the light of Militarism and we can see how certain wars and certain political pressures did make things happen. We can read at least certain things in world history--including contemporary racial history--in terms of economics and class struggle as do the Marxists. We can certainly read some things in our experience from the perspective of the other causal views. We can identify within our own experience certain kinds of relationships which all of these positions help us to discern. But the problem is that the advocates of these positions use them to provide not simply interpretation of the past, not simply identification of connections, but they get from them imperatives, as they want to add to their description of the past which says "it happened this way," an analysis of the meaning of the past which is that "you must now do this."

It is obvious that the profit motive has created the American economy, and to our friend who is philosophically committed to the American economic system this proves that the profit motive is what should dominate a society. The Marxist says it is class struggle that brings the world forward, therefore it is your business to be a part of the working class or of the Communist party which leads the working class. So each of these positions, after having looked at history and seeing how it develops, goes on to say you should be effective. Knowing how it is that history works, wanting to be effective, you should look for where the levers are, where the controls are that make history run. The Marxist says it's the party and so you should get in the party. The American businessman says it's the investment trade or it's the armament industry so that's where you should go. The man with the militaristic view of American society says it's the Pentagon--that's the center of meaning, that's where you can be meaningful. And the person who is impressed with the capacities of education to change society says that the most strategic place to be is in a teachers' college or an accrediting agency. And then once you have found the levers, once you know how this historic machine, whether it be the individual man or all of society, works, then you pull them, then you run society from the top because you've found the top. So, the Marxist will use the party to create a Socialist society and the businessman will use the investment business and the manipulation of the economy through advertising and through competition to create the kind of economy he wants and each in his way will try to take control of history.

He who tries to take control of history makes some assumptions. He first of all assumes that he is good and wise so that he has a right to control history. This is a common assumption of everyone in any of these positions who finally works out his reasons for taking this position. Those who hold this position, whether it be that of John Dewey or Karl Marx or Secretary McNamara, not only claim to know what makes this thing go but they claim a right to make it go the right way because we are good and wise. We are trustworthy. We can use the power we have found.

The second assumption these views make is that I, or we, at least are not merely a product of the system because we can rise above it to use it and have not only the capacity but the obligation to be outside of the mechanism in order to operate it. The man who's on top of the machine doesn't think he's the product of the machine, even if he thinks everybody else is only a cog. And yet he doesn't think everybody else is only a cog either; for in spite of the fact that he tends to assume that they are only part of the machine that he can manipulate, he wants them to agree with him. He wants them to believe.

There is on the Goshen College faculty a new professor this year, is a very acute student of psychology, who is especially impressed by the paradox, which fits right in with what we're speaking about, of the determinist psychologists who claim that the human animal is just an animal and just a machine; we don't know everything about it yet but we'll pretty soon know enough about it that we can make this machine operate; even thoughts and ideals are simply a product of the mechanism. We can't help the thoughts we have because the career through which our body went just gave us these thoughts--and yet the people who hold this view are evangelizing for determinism. They're trying to convince people. They're arguing for it as if the people they were talking to could change their minds; as if they were free, as if they were not the products of their bodies.

This has been a long way around to uncover a fundamental weakness in any materialistic or deterministic scheme; or rather, two fundamental weaknesses. One is that although it sets out to be a way to explain the universe it winds up making a case for control, giving a certain class of people the impression that they should be on top of the heap. Although it didn't say it was starting out toward that goal this is what happens in intellectual and cultural history and this raises for us a clear, ethical warning.

And the other thing that we have observed by coming around this detour is that it is always self-refuting and therefore incoherent for a deterministic scheme to provide imperatives. For people who organize and interpret the world and man as being a machine to have any moral claims or even any truth claims is a refutation of their position because they say that their position is just the result of mechanism. You have to hold it because you can't help it; and yet they try to commend it to people who don't hold it. They are thus assuming that there is freedom, there is responsibility after all and that he who is pleading with someone else to believe that determinism is an adequate explanation and the person

with whom he pleads to believe that determinism is an adequate explanation-- at least these two people are free. Then determinism isn't an adequate explanation; the whole set of explanations undermines itself. We don't have to quote the Bible against it; we just have to look at it a little closer for it to fall apart.

But our point is not only that determinism is incoherent and self-refuting, it's morally a source of evil. For when one says of one's position that it is at the same time necessary, unavoidable, and that it is good that you should do it, this is a source of incorrigible pride. I mean "incorrigible" in the literal sense. There is no way to correct it. If I am proud because I think I am an artist, that can be corrected by looking at the way I draw. If I am proud because I think I am a scholar, that can be corrected by looking at my grades. But if I am proud because I think I'm in agreement with the mainspring of history and that I therefore have the right to push history the direction it's going to go, then nobody can stop me.

This is the way you produce a Stalin. Marxism said that history is moving inevitably toward the Communist state by way of a violent revolution which will be led by the party. That has to happen and it should happen. Stalin said, "That's us. That's what I'm doing." So anything that he did in order to make that come to pass was not subject to criticism. He had merged necessity and morality and there's just no ground on which you can argue with such a person. He has the invincible certainty that the mechanism is going to work this way, allied with the religious passion which says it ought to, and therefore he has the right to crush anything that gets in the way.

So as it works out there is a further curious turning of this position back upon itself. It was the Marxists, taking them again just as a sample for a position which would be pretty parallel to all the others, who told us that religion was just an ideology invented by the ruling class to keep the workers patient; and now we're finding out, and we found out especially in the later years of Stalin, that Marxism is just an ideology invented to justify the tyranny of the Communist party, which according to its theory was supposed to fade away once it got control yet isn't planning to do anything of the kind. So determinism, which somehow should have gotten the problem of tyranny and of moral choice out of the way, actually winds up simply making a moral case for tyranny and once again refutes itself from the inside.

Perhaps it will take some mental exercise to move now from this analysis of a non-Christian position from the inside of that position to the kind of light that this throws back upon the meaningfulness of Christian faith; yet it is only by taking the alternatives seriously that we can clarify and justify to ourselves our affirmation that faith does make sense.

The second type of position, which I think is a little closer to the experience of some of us in its contemporary outworkings, is the idea that man is a puppet of forces inside himself. There has been probably

no greater change in man's habit of thinking in any one generation than the change that has taken place in our generation, or the last fifty years, in our thinking both about ourselves and our neighbor's selves through the coming of a broad pattern of thought which we might label "psychodynamics." This is not simply the work of any one man or school of thought, although certainly a number of names are especially significant in the developing of this attitude. It is a general approach of a whole civilization. It stretches from the very narrowly defined position of an individual like Freud, which seemed to make of a man a mechanism with three centers of power inside his head, to a much vaguer kind of attitude which we find in social work and counseling as crafts to help people.

For some, this explanation of the forces that make man what he is is predominantly inter-personal, thinking of the way several individuals relate to one another and what that does to a person. Others make it more intra-personal, trying to identify the forces completely within the individual personality which make him what he is. But I think there is a sense in which all of this is one stream of thought and is fast becoming, if it has not already become, the dominant folk mentality of American intellectuals. Whichever type of position within this broad stream we choose, they're telling us that the real explanation for my being who I am is not on the surface and not in the intellect but somewhere deeper, somewhere hidden, so that in my relations with other people this psychodynamic awareness gets in the way, standing between what I say on the surface and what I see on the surface of the other person. We can never take ourselves or each other at face value anymore. When you meet someone on the street and he says, "Hello," you stop and think, "I wonder what he meant by that?"

And so it is that this habit of thought gnaws away in our mutual confidence. We always have to assume, "There must be something eating him," and we try to figure out behind the screen of what a person says what he really means, by the techniques of analysis that we can get almost anywhere in the culture around us. Now the issue which I'm trying to identify is not the healing use, the therapeutic use, of these insights into the workings of the human personality for those who need therapeutic help. What I am challenging is the way in which this type of insight, just like the valid insights of Karl Marx, has become a popular religion, has become a dominant way of looking at the human being we encounter and has thereby succeeded in undermining or making almost impossible the very valid communication between people which it, at the outset, had set out to try to make possible. For this position, just like the others, says that religion, faith, belief, is a projection of these inter-personal and intra-personal relationships, maybe a useful projection. It's one of the ways that those underground pressures come to the surface so that we can see what's cooking there underneath. But what faith talks about isn't really there and the statements, the historical claims, the witness of Christian faith, is to be evaluated and understood only as a mirror of man's own inner struggles.

This way of understanding ourselves as the puppet of our inner forces can have several kinds of outworkings. It can become like the things which make man a puppet of the outside, a tool for tyranny. We

already have some ominous warnings of this in the brainwashing techniques of police states and the subliminal advertising methods which don't tell us they're being used on us. We don't know how much of this can be done, but there's reason at least to fear that it could be the tool of a new and specially insidious tyranny. It could have a quite different effect, and does certainly on some people; it can tell us that since strong convictions and decided ideas are usually the reflection of inner tension, the thing to do is to relax. We shall find a resolving of our tensions not by doing something but by going somewhere and making life meaningful in achievement and personal relationships, but just by not trying so hard--just accept things the way they are. Thus again, adjustment as itself a final goal, is a tyranny. I speak again not of valid and helpful ways of dealing with troubled people but of the kind of attitude this approach tends to make us all take towards ourselves all the time.

Now what do we think of all of these options as Christians? Some, in fact most Christians in the past, have felt it was their duty to deny and to attack every element of these positions as unbelief because they obviously are not belief. They are not clear expressions of Christian faith. They relegate faith to the level of projection or of ideology. And yet this is not enough. In the first place it's not enough because this is no way to convince modern man, simply by telling him he's wrong from our standpoint. Remember, he isn't interested in being right from our standpoint until we can show him what hold our standpoint should have on him. Secondly, it isn't adequate because it isn't true that these positions are all only unbelief. For every one of them reflects part of a true and specifically Christian view of man, an incomplete one, a segment, a fragment, and yet represents valid insights. The idea that man is an economic animal, driven by need and by hunger, and that he is indecently treated when he is not adequately rewarded for his work is a biblical idea. Karl Marx got it from the Bible only indirectly, but Karl Marx cannot be explained apart from the Jewish tradition in which he grew up, in which the prophets had condemned unfair employment practices in ancient Israel in just the way Karl Marx condemned them and Christians should have been condemning them in 19th century Britain. If we had the time and if we were competent in those fields, we could demonstrate much of the same kind of thing concerning each of these other views of man. The determinisms are part of the Christian vision of man, even all the way to Freud.

But what's wrong with these positions is that instead of becoming valid insights helping us to understand man within faith, they attempt to close the universe and to be complete of themselves. This is the point at which they turn in upon themselves and become inconsistent as I tried to demonstrate, affirming meaning at the same time that they deny freedom. This is the indication that those positions have their validity when placed in a larger Christian context, when they become the frame not of determinism but of responsibility. In a world in which it is true, as Marx said, that man is driven by economic need; in a world in which it is true, as the Pentagon says, that men will do what you tell them if you threaten them enough; in a world in which it is true, as Freud says, that man is driven by his failure to come to terms with his inner needs, Christians are to react responsibly--not to say that man is the puppet of these

forces but that where these forces meet is the place we are to be free and human and responsible. And this is of course exactly what the mechanists themselves say when after saying man is a puppet they go on telling him to do something about it. You don't tell a puppet to do something, but all of these people do.

The Christian is the only one who can face the fact that when human responsibility is abused and man does wrong the fault is that of man and not of the world in which he lives, not of the forces playing upon him. If man is to be saved this must be by saving not the world by the top by getting hold of the levers of control, but by saving the man. And if his lostness is what Christians say it is and what none of these other people can explain, a lostness of personal relationship to a personal God, then the way to save man is not to change his world first but to meet him as a person, not to use power on him, power to oblige him to do what he has been failing to do, but to bring to bear on him that forgiveness which re-establishes the relationship or communion for which man was made.

So, when I suggest that faith is coherent, instead of repeating simply all of the very helpful things that we can say and have said over and over again to ourselves about the appropriateness of the Christian world view, we are most helped by saying, even though it is in a sense a detour on our intellectual road, that the meaningfulness of the Christian faith is perhaps demonstrated most clearly by the ways in which it is reflected in the positions which try to reject it. Try to deny what Christian faith says about life being meaningful because man is free and responsible; you can deny in your system that man is free and responsible, but you'll still wind up trying to do something about it and therefore assuming that you are free and responsible. It is precisely the philosopher who has just been lecturing to his class that they are all puppets of determinism who, if he goes out in the street and finds someone has let the air out of his tires, will be angry at the person who did it because he didn't have to do it, in fact he shouldn't have.

It is fundamentally only the Christian faith that has the nerve to put the problem where it lies, not in a world that went wrong somehow because some ancestor did one evil deed, not in a world that went wrong somehow because some class is exploiting people, or because ignorance is keeping man from realizing his potential, but a world that went wrong and stays wrong and goes wrong all over again because every one of us responds in disobedience, in personal disobedience, in rebellious self-affirmation to the God who made us for his fellowship. And since it is only Christians who can bear to face this statement about themselves in confession, it is also only Christians who can provide a coherent, a rational, a meaningful answer.

What do we do about the need? We don't change society so that there won't be any exploiting owners anymore. We don't change society so that there won't be any ignorant brutes anymore. We don't change society so that there won't be any national enemies anymore. Each of these explanations for what's wrong with the world puts the trouble "out there" somewhere, and that isn't where the trouble is. So the coherence of the

Christian faith is its confessional character, and the fact that it not only identifies the problem in the right place, but that only it has an answer which fits with its diagnosis. Stalin says, "What's wrong with the world is tyranny, the tyranny of the exploiting classes, so let me be the tyrant and then we'll be all right." His solution denies his diagnosis. Only the Christian who accepts that he doesn't have the right to run the world, that he isn't God, that he can't be trusted with the world, has in the restoration of fellowships with the suffering presence of God and his Son, an answer which can finally make the pieces fit together. They won't fit together in such a way that we'll have a case for taking over the world--that's precisely the point--they will fit together in such a way that we can be dragged along in the triumph of God whose triumph in the world is not that of a tyrant, but of a suffering father.

ONCE FOR ALL

It is one of the mental habits of the world around us to use the word "religion" as a general category within which Jewish, Christian, Buddhist faith all find a place. There is something logical about this, looking at each of these phenomena from the outside. We can think of a constantly narrowing series of circles. The broadest would be the realm of spiritual values. A slightly smaller circle would be organized religion. A still smaller would be the Christian tradition, within that Protestantism, and within that the several denominations. We cannot keep sociology and philosophy from looking at it this way. But if we want to understand the nature of biblical faith we do have reason not to let ourselves be limited by thinking of Christian faith as one of the religions; for there are certain deep ways in which biblical faith is anti-religious. This thought is perhaps not new to most of you--perhaps it is to some.

We could in fact say that what I've been trying to say these days has been constantly an argument against religion, because religion is usually spoken of as the path to self-fulfillment. That's what we spoke of Monday. Religion is usually thought of as a coherent philosophy of life which commends itself to the honest, objective, rational person. That's what we spoke of yesterday. Religion is usually thought of as concentrating upon demonstrating a world view which includes the existence of deity, yet there have been many times in history when biblical faith, Jews in early Roman times and Christians in later Roman times, opened its believers to the charge of "atheism" because they had no visible gods to serve. They had no idols.

Today we want to focus on and to criticize another part of this same religious view of life which Christian faith discards. A major portion of what most people do with their faith is the struggle to give meaning to the great cycles of life. There is the great biological cycle, marked in any culture by the milestones of puberty, marriage, childbirth

and death. All cultures recognize these milestones with special kinds of ritual and ceremony. For some of them one of these experiences is more important than the others, but all societies, all cultures have ways of recognizing that each of these events in the career of the human individual is a sort of a threshold that calls for attention, that changes the person's status and his relationship to the community. In fact, in most primitive faiths, and in some highly civilized religions, death is no more a milestone than some of the others. It too simply changes the mode of relationship between the individual and the community.

The other great cycle which religions celebrate is the annual or cultural cycle. Hunters and shepherds from all ages have moved about from one grazing land or one hunting land to another as the changing climates made pastures available here and then there, as the migrations of animals brought them into a place where they could be caught. The non-nomadic people, the farmers of ancient civilization, needed to keep in touch with the cycle of rains, floods, and dry periods in order for their crops to grow. This explains why astronomy (astrology) was the first science.

Beyond this, "religion" has generally given a supernatural sanction to human communities, to the nation in our day, or to the king himself as a representative of God on earth, as he was in most ancient religions and as the priest--king--chief still tends to be in primitive tribal faiths. Ethnic religion is the standard historic pattern. All of this has meant that the more religious is one's view of life, the more attention is given to these cycles, biological cycle and astronomical,--and the less real movement there is. Every year is the same--you have spring, then you have summer, then you have fall. Every life is the same. It goes through these same events in the same order and then it's over. So there's no real thrust to human history. It goes round and round. But, in seeming contradiction to this, another effect of this religious view of things is that everyday life is not very important because we look forward to the great celebrations. Each individual has in his total human career four or five of these great milestones: the rest of the time he simply looks back to one and waits for the next, when again something significant must happen in his experience. And with the annual cycle we look forward, we look back to three or four landmarks in the year which can be religiously marked and celebrated and the rest of the time we just sit around and wait and work. So the transcendent, the religious, is the out-of-the-ordinary and the out-of-this-world.

Biblical faith began, in the very earliest contacts that we can discern between ancient Israel and her neighbors, with changes made in this cyclical view of religion. The OT faith did involve the celebration of annual feasts: harvest feasts, spring festival rites. Instead of celebrating simply the cycle of the year, the coming of the rains and the coming of the harvests, these celebrations were transformed by Israel into the occasions for commemorating the works of God in time, for commemorating the taking of the land, for commemorating the giving of the law at Sinai, and for commemorating especially the deliverance at the Red Sea, the Exodus which created Israel a people. The same was the case for the very few rites we know of connected to the life cycle of the individual. We

have surprisingly little information from the OT about how they went about burying people or marrying people, but the one very obvious ritual, that of circumcision, was also brought by OT understanding into the relationship of history and covenant because it was the sign of the promise that God made to Abraham.

Another way in which this rhythmic, cyclical view of life was broken through was the Sabbath, because the Sabbath comes too often to be thought of as a great holiday. We don't have three of them a year, we have one a week. You're always just before the Sabbath or just after the Sabbath, or celebrating the Sabbath. And this cycle of a seven-day week is not a natural cycle. It can't be derived from the stars or the moon. It's a cycle simply of its having been decided that human life is going to be in manageable units. It gives to life a rhythm which sanctifies every day. The rhythm of six days of work and one day of rest and praise is an everyday rhythm, a rhythm which doesn't depend on the equinoxes and the solstice, doesn't depend on the rain and the dry season.

Professor Enz, whom many of you know, teaching the OT at the Elkhart Seminary, was recently in Israel for a period of study. One of the things that struck him the most was the continued meaning of the Sabbath for these people. Not that in a cramped and puritannical way they tie themselves down like Pharisees not to do anything--most of the Jews of Israel aren't "orthodox"--there is rather a festive feeling about every seventh day. You even greet people with a different word. You don't say "hello;" you say "Sabbath hello," to remind yourself that this is a special day which throws light on the whole week, taking the accent off the fact that we're far from Christmas and far from Easter.

The other way the OT broke through this cyclical not-getting-anywhere view of history was by the promise of the coming Messiah. The NT went even farther with this evaluation of the religious sanctification of the year. Easter was not celebrated by the early Christians once a year at Passover as would have been appropriate and as developed later, but every Sunday was Easter. That was the reason for moving from the Sabbath (Saturday) to Sunday. A resurrection is celebrated once every seventh day in the NT church. We find in the NT no recognition of the cycle of the year as part of Christian worship. We find likewise no recognition of the cycle of human development. Baptism is not related to any one of the crises of human experience. It's in accord with this that the accent has moved in the NT to what it means to be a Christian working, what it means to be a Christian husband or wife, what it means to be a serving member in the Christian fellowship. And the NT church thought of history as going somewhere--coming from the resurrection and going to the kingdom. So whereas for religion, transcendence means what's out of this world and out of our normal life, for the NT the transcendence of God is seen in His intervention, in His command, in His doing something in our experience.

But now since Constantine, since the decision was made to merge the church and the larger European society, Christian worship has been repaganized. We have taken up again the celebration of the rites of spring

with the traditional pagan fertility symbols of the rabbit and the egg and the flowers on ladies' heads which not only threaten to, but in society at large actually do, cover over the real meaning of the resurrection in its uniqueness and in its once-for-allness. An even better example of this distortion is Christmas. Celebrating Easter once a year at least can be argued for on the basis that the first Easter was in the Passover season, but the birth of Christ was surely not December 25. And certainly the reason for deciding to celebrate his birth on December 25 had nothing to do with anyone's knowing when the date was. It was a clear intent to take over a pagan celebration and change it as little as possible. From this we have the yule log and the tree and most of the other kinds of festivity related to what we now call "Christ's mass," but most of what it means to modern society is of pagan origin. It's a celebration of the fact that the nights have stopped getting longer, and the day has stopped getting shorter. The sun has been reborn. This was an old holiday celebrating the rebirth of the sun and since Christ has been spoken of as the light it was thought appropriate to merge the two.

What's wrong with Christmas is not that there are too many decorations downtown too early in November and not that too many merchants make it a good time to sell things; it's that we're celebrating the wrong thing. We're celebrating the eternal recurrence of life, which is a pagan idea, instead of the unique once for all coming of life to men in a man. And that's why we think that even the manger scene is a beautiful thing. We make it sentimental, hiding completely the fact that God's being born in a barn was part of his rejection by men, the beginning of the cross.

Since Constantine we have likewise put a religious coloring on the meaning of the life cycle. We have taken over into Christian practice the rites of adolescence, the rites through which the young person in his early or late teens depending on the civilization is accepted into adult society. Some churches call it baptism, some call it confirmation, but in each case it's rather automatic and its real, anthropological rootage is not in the Bible but in an elementary, human need to recognize the point at which we can begin dealing with a young person as a full person. We have sanctified the rites of marriage to the extent that the only way that you can actually recognize in North America whether a church is in existence legally is to ask whether the preacher has received from the state the right to contract marriages. Such marrying is so little related to the church that it seems quite appropriate to most ministers and to most bridal couples that the minister should perform the service even for non-members, even for non-Christians.

We have, in one way or another, found ways to celebrate the event of birth which we should think of not really as an event for the infant who doesn't know about it yet, but for the parents. Some of us call it dedication, others call it baptism, but again it has no clear origin in biblical faith. It responds to an anthropological-psychic need. And public opinion has just been reminded in the last few months of the extent to which we have put a Christian sheen on death, misinterpreting what it means by the way we pay for it and giving it more attention, we Christians who have reasons not to, than the so-called "pagans" of other societies

who have very definitely their complicated rites for taking leave of the dead, but for whom it doesn't cost as much or put on as much show as in our society.

The effect of the entire development, concentrating "religion" again not on "once for all" but on what goes round and round and round and is sure to get everybody sometime--the year, and the life cycle. The effect of this has been just what it was in paganism. It has been to make every day unreligious and to make every Sunday dull because it isn't a high point, it isn't a religious event. Again this has meant that the real dynamic of our life is elsewhere in faith and in the church. The real drive for pushing modern Christian church members is the accumulation of economic strength in job and in family. And the real center of the meaning of history is whether we can build a bigger and better democracy, whether we can beat the Russians at the game of impressing the world with our strength. The nation, not the church, is the real center of history.

Well, what can we do to recover a sense of this "once for allness" of God's work among men as over against men's desire that God should simply come in and bless the turning points of their lives? We can work at the abuses. Conscientious objection, for instance, can undercut the idolatry of the natural community and break through the idea of an ethnic faith with God commanding us to fight for our nation and commanding the Germans to fight for their nation and the Russians for theirs. This is one thing we can do.

There has been throughout the Christian church a serious effort on the part of some, Quakers in the days of George Fox and others in our day, actively to reject the practice of Easter and Christmas celebration in the forms in which we know them. Whether this is the most possible and the most meaningful thing to do still needs to be discussed. It isn't a closed matter but it does need to be discussed. We can't assume that we can "put Christ back into Christmas" if he never really was its center, and we can't assume that Sunday can be made more meaningful if we keep the meaning of Easter to be celebrated only once every spring.

Another abuse to work at is the confusion between baptism and the rites of adolescence. This is something that has been identified before and can continue to be purified. And yet perhaps more than identifying abuses we should be looking for ways to redefine the center or re-discover the center. This would mean first of all simply coming to grips with the humanity, the reality, the simplicity of the man Jesus, the Jesus of the New Testament, in whom Christians affirm both that we see what God means man to be and that God has made himself visible. This can happen only once. We can rediscover the reality of the Christian community as different from the nation, different from the family, different from the clan, a community of commitment and therefore of fellowship. This community will be in any society foreign, as we said Sunday evening. It will be in any society a new kind of social organism, which therefore by its very existence will demonstrate a breakthrough and the release from the prisons of existing anthropological units.

And perhaps to say this in just another way. We must let ourselves be taught again by the Bible's indifference to times and seasons, to ritual and cycle, taught again that it is in our world, it is seven days a week with most of those days dedicated to being useful and one of them dedicated to return and recovery. It is in this ordinary world that God's purposes are to be carried forward by plain, ordinary, daily obedience so that those occasional crises through which every individual passes but only seldom, and those great turning points of the climate and the earth year which mattered so much to our agricultural ancestors, will seek to be the focus of our interest. And instead of trying to pile a little more intensity and a little more impiety into those annual celebrations, we shall, as did Paul in the New Testament say, "Somebody wants to celebrate them, all right. Somebody doesn't, that's all right, too." That isn't what faith is about. Faith is being used in ordinary ways to do ordinary jobs in line with the commandment of a God whose transcendence consists precisely not in his being out of this world but his having come into it with authority.

Shall we pray.

Our Father, we have not always recognized how bound we have been, how limited, how enslaved, by the idea of a schedule full of religious practices going round and round, practices removed from our daily life and centered upon special events in nature. Free us from nature for history. Free us from the stars and from concentration upon the biological cycle to be persons; and create in this world, including us we pray, that new fellowship which sees what has happened in thy son "once for all" as the center of its attention and which sees what thou dost choose to do among men and dost promise to do to fulfillment as our task. In the name of him whose birthday we do not know we pray. Amen.

FAITH IS FELLOWSHIP
(John 20:19-23)

The work of Jesus, especially as reported in the gospel according to John, was scandalous to the pious people of his time especially for two reasons. The first was the kind of relationship he claimed to have with his father, one of unique sending with authority. We need not study faithful Judaism long to understand why the kind of claim that Jesus made, to have been sent by the father, and to have authority to speak in the father's name could only be seen as blasphemous. But Jesus pushed this authority even farther, or at least made his claim to it still more unacceptable, by forgiving people, saying to specific individuals that their sins were forgiven. It's only when we grasp the full weight of the unacceptable character of these claims of Jesus concerning himself that we can then grasp as well the meaning of what Jesus said to the disciples in the passage we've just read together. He tells these fearful and fallible men, "I now send you as the father sent me," and pushes this to the ultimate in saying, "If you forgive sins, they stand forgiven." For those to whom the name God is just a word, just another word for your own highest ideals or your own deepest insights, this doesn't necessarily mean too much. But we're asking rather what it meant in Judaism in the time of Christ to say this.

There's more than one place where this claim is made. In almost parallel words it is said in Matthew 16, again in Matthew 18, where the phrases have to do with "binding and loosing" with the "keys of the kingdom." Somewhat similar thought is found as well elsewhere in discussions of prayer. But here the point is being made in a way that is most crucial. God has chosen to work in the world through finite and fallible men. Our task this evening in talking about faith as fellowship is simply to spell out what this means.

One of the constant temptations of the church, and especially of the most faithful people within the church, is that kind of theological confusion or error which we label technically as "docetic," which means not recognizing the full humanity of Jesus. We find this reflected not in the New Testament itself but in the pious legends which grew up around the New Testament in the early church, according to which, for example, the infant Jesus never cried, or the boy Jesus never really grew in understanding, in self-awareness, and the other dimensions of human existence. Jesus was fully human; he meant something politically to his society, he meant something economically in his society. He had a place in the struggle of an oppressed people, the Jews, for their liberty which, the Old Testament had promised to them, and which in some sense he was offering to give them (though not in the sense they wanted). The final safeguard of the understanding that Jesus was human is perhaps the fact that the church is human and that God has been pleased not only to work through one perfect man, but even to place his authority in the fellowship of imperfect and fallible men which we call the church, not only fallible but failing, feeble. This work of God is not the work of a business organization, of a nation, of a hierarchy, but of a fellowship.

In Matthew 16 we find these statements made about Peter, who is told that he has the keys of the kingdom and will be authorized to open and to close. Chapter 18 of Matthew reports the Word of Jesus which said

this of the whole church as the fuller way of saying it. We can see the functioning of this promise in the disciples' circle of the book of Acts, where it was a collective activity and not the assignment of a specially authorized person, even an apostle.

The word "fellowship" is a term that we have made pious by the fact that it is used only in certain circles and to refer to certain types of meaning. We don't really stop and ask now what the word does actually mean. The history of the word is a very simple one. It means simply to share. We use the word fellowship to talk about a financial grant to a student, because it is derived from the time when a given group of students would share in the life of the university household. Fellowship is not first of all a spiritual reality in the sense that what we share can only be ideas or religious experiences. The fellowship of the early church was first of all a geographical fellowship, meaning that the disciples were all in one place--around Jesus. Then it was a financial fellowship. The disciples of Jesus, as far as we can tell, had one purse, and an effort was made in the early days of the church of Jerusalem to reproduce this collective financial structure. My point just now is not to say whether Christians today should have a different way of handling property, but to indicate that fellowship first of all did have an extremely concrete meaning.

There will be no rediscovery of what the Christian faith means for our day without new discoveries of what it means to work together in God's name as Jesus told the church to do. In fact, the word church is reported only twice in the gospels as having been used by Jesus; and these are precisely the two places where he speaks of the authorization given to this body of disciples to bind and to loose in his name, to forgive or to leave unforgiven, to deal with men's moral position with God's authority.

This nature of fellowship as the pattern of obedience has been demonstrated in many contemporary movements. We think of Elton Trueblood who has brought into being series of fellowship circles called "yoke-fellows;" the work of Samuel Shoemaker. The reconstitution of inter-city churches has often meant finding new ways for Christians to come together to take each other seriously. This was the case in the work of John Wesley; it was the case for the work of George Fox; it was the case, going back still farther, of the early Anabaptists, and going back still farther, it was the real originality of the monastic movements of the Middle Ages, that they brought together groups of people for a deeper kind of sharing both economic, vocational, and in the moral discipline of being a Christian.

There can of course be private religious sentiment; there can be spiritual experiences where man, as individual, relates directly to God in prayer, in mystical contemplation. There are other religions where man or men are related to God through a special kind of man, a priest, an intermediary, but neither of these is Christian faith. Neither of these suffices to be all of what Christian faith speaks of. Christian faith is standing together in the Divine Presence.

Many are willing to use the functioning of a group as a tool. Especially in our day we read of small groups as a good way to teach. We find universities breaking down classroom groups into smaller circles as a way of getting the point of the lecture across, or we find mental health agencies using group therapy as a way to help people to express themselves. But the fellowship of the Christian church, although it might have the effect of making learning easier and will certainly if its functions have the effect of assisting people with their problems, is not a technique; it's not a device. It is the meaning of faith that we are brought not only into vague universal fellowship, but into specific local sharing. Nor is the work of Christians in group fellowship in the congregation simply a tool of mission, of the propagation of the faith, simply a response to the Christian message, a result of certain needs that Christians have. It is in itself part of the reconciliation which is the gospel. The gospel is not only that man is forgiven but that there are re-established among men the same kind of renewed relationships that were established between God and man in the work of Christ. As the epistle of John makes perfectly clear, it is only through other men that God can be personal to us. The epistle of John asks about people who say they love God but don't love their brethren; it's a contradiction in terms. It can't be true. We can only think of God as the person who loves us and whom we love in return if this experience is reflected in our relationship to brethren.

I spoke Monday about the idea of self-realization and the inadequacy of that concept as a guide for what faith is about, claiming that we are misled when we think of the faith as merely meeting the need to be ourselves or to find oneself. But what is really wrong, inadequate, with the concept of self-realization is not only the idea that this self is what I should be seeking and serving, the idea is furthermore a source of danger and confusion because I then tend to assume that it is the self which goes about the task of realizing the self. Not only is the independent self not the end; it is not the means either. The means to whatever it is that the gospel wants to do must be in consonance with the end, and if the goal of God's purposes with us is fellowship then the method must be that as well. Otherwise, whatever might be the beautiful grasp that I have of God's arching purposes, there wouldn't be any way to stop me from fulfilling them in my own wrong way; it is precisely at this point that we need one another.

One possible way to identify the worst temptations in our time, the worst kind of idolatries, would be to use the three nouns referring to the three centers of human concern in our age. The first is Mars. Especially when the use of military methods and military threats is talked of as in the name of peace it is doubly difficult to label and criticize. It's hard to deny that the military industry and the military mentality constitute for our nation one of the major centers of loyalty competing with the Christian faith for our allegiance.

The second and a very tightly linked deity is Mammon. The word Mammon is a proper noun when Jesus uses it; it means precisely to point to the way in which money takes on the characteristics of an idol. It

tells us what to do and how, and we do it. And yet, perhaps deeper than the temptation and the hold that these idols have upon us, there is the temptation which is constituted by the service of Me. When I serve myself, when I decide how my self is to be served, it is then that I need some kind of warning, some kind of intervention. And I can't be stopped by my own insight because it's precisely my own mind that's off the track. I can only be stopped, in this kind of self-centeredness in the working out of what I think is God's purpose for me, if there are brethren, if there are people I rub against who are able to tell me, and in a way that I can grasp and accept because we have mutually accepted one another, of the danger of my making myself not only the end but also the means of my life.

To come back to the statement of Jesus to his fearful disciples, the work of God is forgiveness in fellowship. Now if one of us were to set up a religion we would be concerned to have a body of sacred documents and some instructions to our disciples about how to interpret them. Or we would be concerned to have some rules of proper behavior and some instruction about how to put these rules into effect. Or we would be concerned to have a vision of what is the essence of religious experience and how to propagate this among men. Jesus didn't do any of these things. His disciples with time did fill in in their ministry what there was to say on these subjects--sacred documents, proper behavior, religious experience--but all that Jesus left behind was the mandate to tell men they are forgiven. This is what Matthew 18 says as well as John 20. He didn't tell them to do it through an organization, and one of the serious misunderstandings of this command is of course the Roman Catholic one which understands its fulfillment as the work of a set-aside caste of sacramental people. There is a condition; the condition which we state each time we pray the Lord's Prayer. Men are forgiven as they enter into a context of forgiveness. We ask to be forgiven as we forgive. Often when Christians organize to make of the church more than a forgiving fellowship, the reason is to avoid the need to forgive. If instead of being reconciled with the brother, we can invoke a policy, or we can use parliamentary procedure, or we can refer the matter to some other agency or committee, then we don't need to face the imperative to be reconciled which is our central duty.

Many movements of personnel in the church, many movements of ministers from congregation to congregation, of missionaries from one field to another, of church agency employees from one field of service to another, takes place because of the lack of faith in the possibility of forgiveness, not because someone is specialized or is more efficient in another field of service to which he goes, but to avoid the need to clear up, to face, to be reconciled, over a problem that has arisen among brethren.

For years, for generations, we have tried to prop our faith on the idea that everyone has a certain amount of faith, even non-Christians, and the Christian faith sort of stands on the solid foundation of those religious insights which all men have by nature, by birth, or by some sort of general revelation through nature and through reason. The idea that there is a divine being, the idea that there is moral obligation--these are things that

we have thought everyone knew. For centuries it was possible for our minds to work this way. Then the church was just one place where these ideas of deity and of duty were given more precise denominational meaning, if you please. Modern man can no longer assume all those things. Modern man is not coming to us with a belief in God, wanting only to fill in the gaps of that knowledge; he's not coming to us with a belief in duty and asking us for guidance in working out the details of living a good life. Yet there's one thing that modern man still does want and that is to be forgiven, to be received into a functioning relationship of people who love one another beyond the line of duty. And because this is the one thing that the church is not equipped to provide--the Catholic Church does it in a way, but in a very impersonal way; others of us do it only in the general proclamation of an invitation from the pulpit to repent--but because we do not provide this to modern man in normal experiential means in groups which he can participate in, modern man goes to the bartender or to the psychotherapist in order to be listened to by someone who at least seems to be accepting him. But it's often a poor replacement for his true need for fellowship.

Most of the time we tend to debate, in talking about the Christian life, what we ought to do. Right now the current theological discussion has to do with the nature of moral obligation. Is it principles eternal in the mind of God and in the Bible or in the mind of man, or is it making the best of a given situation? Principles or relativism? This we debate as if the issue really were what should we do. But our real problem is that we didn't do what we knew we should and this is what no discussion of moral obligation will suffice to deal with. The answer even to the question of what we should do is not a set of logical arguments, a procedure for deducing c from b, b from a, but there, too, the answer is a personal process of search together in the situation.

Jesus speaks, according to the passage from John which we read, literally of forgiveness. The passage in Matthew uses another term, speaking of "binding and loosing." In addition to the note of forgiveness which this phrase carries, there's an additional meaning in the usage of the rabbinical literature of the time. To "bind and loose" meant not only to forgive or not, to allow into the fellowship of the synagogue or not, but it also meant to rule on specific actions--what is permitted, commanded, and what is forbidden. The congregation is authorized by God not only to forgive but to take positions on matters of ethical concern. Where do we get guidance in ethics? Not from an ethics teacher: not from a rule book, but in the assembly of those of us who struggle together to find the will of God, who together study Scripture as it applies to the situation as we know it and needs as we can feel them, and the love of God as it comes to bear in our own concern.

The Word of God in fellowship has often been spoken of--we saw especially Sunday morning a phrase that makes this clear--as making all things new, as creating something that hadn't been there before. Now pagan religion, like most current forms of Christian religious activity, sanctifies the existing units of society. It strengthens our devotion to the nation. We all know the popular inter-mingling of Christian and

American dedication. We can speak of the military chaplaincy, which is an institution where those two things cross over, or we can think of the Pledge of Allegiance in the public schools. We can think of the strong backing of the military effort by most denominations, Protestant and Catholic, in every country in which they are. Even on both sides of any given war, Catholic and Protestant clergy will bless the military effort. But it's not only on the military level. On every level religion takes given units of society and strengthens them, ties them together. We have had, in our own past as Mennonites, experience of the way in which religion can be used as the binding force for a linguistic minority group, for a group of migrants keeping themselves separate from the larger society.

The difference between Christian fellowship and religion is thus, in addition to things we've said before, that it creates a new kind of community. It does not take the existing community and bless it. It creates a new community which is characterized precisely by not being across those lines. The apostle Paul describes as the center of the revelation given to him as the apostle to the Gentiles, the fact that God has broken down the wall between Jew and Gentile to create one new humanity made up of both, identical with no prior human grouping. And the breaking down of the wall between Jew and Greek is for Paul is an indispensable expression of the breaking down of the wall between man and God. The vision of the heavenly city in Revelation 4 and 5 is culminated by the vision of people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation entering into praise. And that's why it is not enough simply to do what we were doing before, but do it piously and in the name of God, simply to carry on our job, carry on our economic functioning and to let our village, our city, our nation, our family, be illuminated with Christian truth. The coming of Jesus into the world brings a new kind of fellowship which demands a new kind of structure. That structure which we call the church must be independent of the others. It must not be the same as the state as it has been in some European countries, nor must it be the same as the village as it has been in some Mennonite colonies. It must be a fellowship of voluntary commitment.

Now permit me to close by moving to a more practical level. What will this mean for us in our efforts at carrying out the command and the promise of God that we can be a fellowship acting and even taking position in his name on the issues that confront us in our need for forgiveness and reconciliation? One thing that has come to the surface in our discussions this week has been the extent to which we are creatures of habit. If we face this fact we need to be responsible for it.

One illustration I can use for the difference this makes is to ask you to try to grasp in your imagination something of the experience of a teenage African girl who leaves her primitive village to take nurses' training in a mission hospital. She had grown up in the world of primitive animism in which the cause of disease was spirits behind the trees, and the thing to do to ward off disease was to have a fetish, some object or collection of objects--an old cow's horn or the hair or the fingernails or some other part of a living being that could be preserved and dried and

kept in a reverent way. There was no scientific proof to this theory of disease but her parents and her village guided their lives by it. And so she assumed that this is the way it was. Her reflexes, her reverence for the fetish, and her fear of the trees, was the normal, habitual outworking of the theory of the origins of disease. The theory isn't true in any sense that we can find, but it made sense in their terms and they trained themselves by it. Then this girl comes into a mission hospital. The teaching doctor and nurse take her to a microscope and show her those little things moving around, and show her how a culture grows until you have a visible spot of bacteria, and show her how inoculation works, and otherwise initiate her into the germ theory of disease. Yet her reflexes are still the reflexes of the spirit theory of disease. It will take literally years before this girl is habitually ready to respond to dirt in a hospital, to a wound, to the breath of a sick patient, as if germs were the vehicles of disease. She knew it right away the first time the doctor showed her, but she didn't know it so as to be formed by it, to be guided by it, until she had spent months and years operating as if it were true.

So it is with our use of the Christian faith as a guide. We can rather simply run our mind through the reasoning which demonstrated the plausibility of the claims of Christian faith. But it's only if we have ways and places to develop the habit of operating under the assumption that this is true, that this idea of faith will become a habit of faith, that instead of simply thinking of faith as a possibility it will become for us a normal practice. And this is also one of the functions of Christian fellowship. We accustom one another to think of issues, to think of each other, to think of ourselves as if those things which we say when we think about faith were true. A special need in our society, and especially in the intellectual world--especially in those parts of the intellectual world which have been the most greatly influenced by contemporary scientific and psychological insight--is that there precisely we spend most of our time habitually thinking in terms which don't need to consider God as part of the picture, so that obviously we get our mental reflexes accustomed to his absence. We believe in his presence but we don't need to use it in the physics lab, or in anatomy, or in most of the other things that we have to take part into pieces to understand them. It is in functioning fellowship that we help one another develop the habit, the accustomed procedure, the reflex of facing any experience in the light of the assumption that God matters.

The second of these practical footnotes concerning the life of fellowship is that the fellowship of commitment is identifiable. It's people. Fellowship means not only that togetherness which we have, that which we share. It also means the people who share it, the group, the definable group of people who know each other as belonging to one another. That's why it's an everyday matter, because we have to do with each other every day. It's not a specific kind of religious exercise saved up for holy days--it's the way we should always be living. Since I meet people and everyone I meet I am challenged to know, do I meet this person as part of that fellowship in which together we are responsible for one another in faith, or not? And it is because it is identifiable people

that the life of the Christian fellowship is always doing things and going somewhere, not simply coming together again at fixed intervals to hear the same thing said and sing the same songs. It's reaching new people or it's meeting new needs or it's raising new problems or it's giving praise to God for solutions found and answers given, goals attained. So the need for a fellowship to be identified, which was in history the reason for believer's baptism and therefore the reason that there is a Mennonite denomination at all, continues to be one of the testing points for our understanding of faithfulness in fellowship.

One final comment. The kind of subjects we have been treating these days has been largely in the realm of interpretation of what some might call apologetics--thinking together about the reasonableness of the Christian faith, how properly to understand it, how not to misunderstand it, how to relate it to alternative kinds of faith and other claims on our loyalty. This is an exercise of the mind. I'm not sure that this is what was most needed on the Bethel campus. It was what it was most possible for me to prepare notes on before coming. It is something that should have an abiding usefulness in a Christian college campus. It's something which has a place in the intellectual growth process of anyone, and especially the rapid growth process which we call education. And yet what we need to spend most of our time on is not thinking things through, is not answering intellectual answers about how to put thought A and thought B together with fact C. Just as in the New Testament church there were apostles and prophets before teachers in the list of ministries, there have to be teachers, but there have to be mostly other people doing other kinds of things. In the Christian fellowship we need not primarily to understand but we need to understand while doing, understand while serving, understand while loving, understand while praying and praising. The most significant activity of the class meetings which were the center of the Wesleyan revival, and one of the most significant activities of the early Anabaptist congregations was certainly not thinking, certainly not philosophical theology, but helping one another to be faithful in love, forgiving one another, being reconciled to one another, and knowing that when we do this, we do it in God's name. Finding and doing God's will in our lives must continue to be the center around which our curiosity is satisfied and our concern for understanding harnessed. This I find to be beginning in an exciting way in some of the things happening on this campus. It needs to happen in other places and in deeper ways. The promise of Jesus was not that there is an institution which can carry his truth down through the ages, whether a Congregational, or a Presbyterian or a papal institution. His promise was that his work is going to be done by groups of people who take it upon themselves in spite of their limitations, in spite of their past weakness and their predictable future failure, to do in his name the reconciling, the creating of a new kind of community, which is the one thing God wants to get done in this world.

